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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO



ENGLISH
RENAISSANCE
DRAMA

*Edited by A.R. Braunmuller
and Michael Hattaway*



SECOND EDITION

CAMBRIDGE

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The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama

This second edition of the *Companion* offers students up-to-date factual and interpretative material about the principal theatres, playwrights, and plays of the most important period of English drama, from 1580 to 1642. Three wide-ranging chapters on theatres, dramaturgy, and the social, cultural, and political conditions of the drama are followed by chapters describing and illustrating various theatrical genres: private and occasional drama, political plays, heroic plays, burlesque, comedy, tragedy, with a final essay on the drama produced during the reign of Charles I. Several of the essays have been substantially revised and all of the references updated. An expanded biographical and bibliographical section details the work of the dramatists discussed in the book and the best sources for further study. A chronological table provides a full listing of new plays performed from 1497 to 1642, with a parallel list of major political and theatrical events.

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COMPANION TO
ENGLISH
RENAISSANCE DRAMA

EDITED BY
A. R. BRAUNMULLER
AND
MICHAEL HATTAWAY

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

We know that there is no such thing as a 'neutral' organization for a book such as this, indeed, none for any book. Any shaping of material implies (pre)conceptions about that material; every system stipulates an order, any order accepts some values and ignores others. Still, a book must be ordered, and its order should have a phrasable rationale. Throughout, we have aimed for clarity combined with thought-provoking juxtapositions that convey the exciting multifariousness of the drama our contributors examine.

We considered two obvious ways of organizing this *Companion* – by author and by chronology. Our reasons for rejecting these arrangements will make clear the benefits and advantages of the pattern we did choose. Of all the nominally 'literary' arts, theatre involves the widest collaboration. Renaissance English drama is, like classical Greek drama, heavily language-biased (and hence written texts provide, or preserve, more pleasure than texts of later drama); nevertheless, the source of these words, the author, is at best *primus inter pares*. For centuries, the act of preparing a play for production has changed the author's original text, and the Renaissance theatre was no different. Talking about plays in terms of their authors, like the common metonymy by which we use 'Milton' to refer to 'L'Allegro', *Arcades*, *Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes*, etc., is a convenience, emphasizing some elements in our relation with a play or other literary work, but ignoring or minimizing others. Discourse about drama almost inevitably speaks of authors and authorship, but to make authors the exclusive basis of our approach to fifty or more years of intense activity ignores the theatre as a collaborative mass art (whether the 'mass' of responding spectators be several hundred at the 'private' Blackfriars or 2,500 at the 'public' Globe), disregards the creative and coercive power of convention, that necessary mediator of similarity and difference, and ignores the less visible but even more powerful forces of society and culture.

An arrangement in chronological terms is still more artificial, since it lacks even the basis in psychological identity provided by individual

authors. Chronology's drawbacks are most simply illustrated in its grossest form, division by regnal periods. 'Elizabethan', 'Tudor', 'Jacobean', 'Stuart' ordinarily can point to the crudest of contrasts, even if we recognize how absurd it is to suppose, for example, that Jonson, Shakespeare, or Chapman, or their theatre companies, or the audiences, or their experiences and sensibilities changed detectably on that day in March 1603 when Queen Elizabeth died. (This absurdity is proved by the fact of revivals: placing prominence on only the first performance of any one play obscures the kinds of popularity and importance it may have enjoyed with different kinds of companies and at different periods – witness the early theatrical fortunes of Marston's *Malcontent*, originally a children's play, but soon performed by an adult, public theatre company in revenge for the children's producing an adult company's play at the Blackfriars.) Any chronological organization suffers from some form of the problem caused by regnal divisions – important theatrical events rarely march to the calendar's arbitrary metronome, and even when one could argue for an overall consistency or expository clarity offered by the plays, players, audiences, and social conditions of, e.g., the 1590s, what of the 1580s, or the half-decade 1615–20? Imprecise or unknown dates of composition, first performance, and revival also serve to make the dates of the volume's chronological range, 1580–1642, define an area of concentration and not set limits to a period.

The predominant organizing principle of this *Companion* is generic, but 'genre' conceived without neo-classical rigidity. Instead, our contributors have been asked to conceive of genre so as to catch some of the idea's Renaissance capaciousness: the mingle-mangle of clowns and kings, the variety of Bartholomew Fair, the social and musical expectations of a masque-audience. Occasionally, identifiable theatrical change does more or less coincide with a period neatly typified by some non-theatrical event, and we feel that Caroline drama is an example. Even here, however, we would claim no hard and fast temporal boundary, no throwing of switch or gears at the accession of Charles I. Rather, social and political changes rooted as far back as the economic and educational crises of the 1590s and parliamentary events of the later years of James's reign now appear forcefully in the plays produced during his son's reign.

Finally, we have made no attempt to be encyclopaedic. Our contributors were each assigned a list of representative plays appropriate to their topics, and were encouraged to offer accounts or analyses of particular passages or sequences. The general editors thus attempted to avoid duplicating material and to make certain that some account appeared of works by each major author, but they could not guarantee that a place would be found for *every* play commonly taken to rank among the period's masterpieces.

Shakespeare was included but given no privileged treatment. Some contributors have ranged more widely from the agreed texts than others, and this was always the intention. The essays seek not to be definitive but perhaps to be paradigmatic: to offer the reader ways of experiencing texts and performances, to provoke further reading, and, above all, to add to the enjoyment of Renaissance dramatic texts in the study and the play-house. The volume's apparatus does, however, attempt a conspectus of the best that has been written about the period and about authors. The Bibliography offers a selection of further reading on many of the topics covered in this volume – and many that could not be included in a book of this size. Major and some minor authors are there accorded a brief biography, a citation of the standard edition of their complete works (if there is one), and a brief list of relevant studies. Within the book, each essay is followed by a bibliographical note in which our expert contributors offer guidance on important past and recent work in their areas. The volume ends with a fairly comprehensive chronological table of plays and theatrical and political events. With these guides, and the volume's indices, we hope to match the curiosity and interest of both general and specialist readers.

Our contributors have graciously helped us and each other in shaping this volume. We thank Mary Jane Ross for her assistance in compiling many of the biographies and bibliographical materials and Sarah Stanton and Victoria Cooper for their patience and counsel in seeing the book through the press.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

Since *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama* first appeared in 1990, a great deal of important writing has appeared concerning the ideology, history, playing spaces, plays, playwrights, audiences, technology and much else of the early modern professional theatre in England. More than a decade on, major works of critical and documentary scholarship enrich our new edition's still heavily selective bibliography and bibliographies. We draw attention to this continued vitality by expanding those parts of the volume and, more important, by inviting our contributors to revise and, where possible, to improve their chapters. To say much more about what is, we trust, improved in this second edition would be invidious and an odorous comparison. As humble and obedient servants of the students, teachers, and practitioners who read this book, we may note exceptional advances in studies of theatrical companies, the lives of individual theatre professionals, the cultural circumstances of play-writing, performance, and reception.

The editors thank, once more, the contributors, and especially wish to thank Anne M. Myers and Beth A. Wightman for assistance in preparing the new edition and Sarah Stanton and the other professionals at the Press who made this revision possible.

A NOTE ON DATES, REFERENCES, AND QUOTATIONS

The dates assigned to plays are those of composition and/or performance and derive from Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama 975-1700*, rev. edn, S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim (London, 1989); these dates are often speculative or unreliable, and contributors have felt free to modify them.

References in the notes are given in full at first mention and by author and short title thereafter. Author and short title only are given for a work that appears in full either in the select bibliography (pp. 372-80) or in the relevant bio-bibliography (pp. 380-419) when the work deals with a particular playwright.

Contributors have generally cited the following editions; divergences from and additions to this list are mentioned in the bibliographies to individual chapters. Spelling and punctuation have been silently modernized.

The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon, gen. ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1966-96)

The Plays of George Chapman: The Comedies (Urbana, Illinois, 1970) and *The Tragedies* (Cambridge, 1987), gen. ed. Allan Holaday

The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker, ed. Fredson Bowers, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1935-61)

The Complete Plays of Ben Jonson, ed. G. A. Wilkes, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1981-2)

The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe, ed. Fredson Bowers, 2nd edn, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1981)

The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger, ed. Philip Edwards and Colin Gibson, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1976)

The Life and Works of George Peele, gen. ed. C. T. Prouty, 3 vols. (New Haven, Conn. 1952-71)

The New Cambridge Shakespeare, gen. eds. Philip Brockbank, Brian Gibbons, and A. R. Braunmuller (Cambridge, 1984-)

The Works of John Webster, ed. David Gunby, David Carnegie, Antony Hammond, and MacDonald P. Jackson (Cambridge, 1995-)

ABBREVIATIONS

CL	<i>Comparative Literature</i>
CompD	<i>Comparative Drama</i>
CritQ	<i>Critical Quarterly</i>
DUJ	<i>Durham University Journal</i>
E&S	<i>Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association</i>
EIC	<i>Essays in Criticism</i>
ELH	<i>ELH: A Journal of English Literary History</i>
ELR	<i>English Literary Renaissance</i>
EM	<i>English Miscellany</i>
ES	<i>English Studies</i>
HLQ	<i>Huntington Library Quarterly</i>
JEGP	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
JWCI	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
MARDIE	<i>Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England</i>
MLN	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
MLQ	<i>Modern Language Quarterly</i>
MLR	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
MP	<i>Modern Philology</i>
NLH	<i>New Literary History</i>
NQ	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
PMLA	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</i>
PQ	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
RenD	<i>Renaissance Drama</i>
RenQ	<i>Renaissance Quarterly</i> (formerly <i>Renaissance News</i>)
RES	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
RMS	<i>Renaissance and Modern Studies</i>
RORD	<i>Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama</i>
s.d.	stage direction

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SEL	<i>Studies in English Literature</i>
ShakS	<i>Shakespeare Studies</i>
ShJ	<i>Shakespeare Jahrbuch</i>
ShS	<i>Shakespeare Survey</i>
SP	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
SQ	<i>Shakespeare Quarterly</i>
TDR	<i>Tulane Drama Review</i>
TSLL	<i>Texas Studies in Language and Literature</i>
UTQ	<i>University of Toronto Quarterly</i>
YJC	<i>Yale Journal of Criticism</i>
YR	<i>Yale Review</i>

I

R. A. FOAKES

Playhouses and players

WHEN we look back at a distant historical period, it is easy to succumb to two temptations; the first is to see a sudden, sharp break with the past taking place at some date such as the coming to the throne of Elizabeth I (1558), or James I (1603), as though a transformation in all aspects of society happened in those instants. The second is to telescope the passage of decades of change into a single, homogenized period like 'the age of Elizabeth', as though forty-five years could be focused in a single, unchanging image. In our own lives we are continually alert to shifts and changes that make what happened or was in vogue ten years, five years, or even one year ago seem curiously old-fashioned and different now. Perhaps it has always been so, even when change was slower technologically. The period from 1558 to the end of the reign of Charles I saw the passage of eighty-four years, during which the theatre was transformed, and the drama startlingly expanded and diversified. It is perhaps unfortunate that the great standard works on the theatres and drama in this period should be entitled *The Elizabethan Stage* and *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*.¹ Yet any account of the period needs to begin with the recognition that there were many different stages as playhouses became more sophisticated, and that perhaps the only constant feature of the theatres up to 1642 was that all parts were normally played by men and boys; the professional companies in London had no actresses in them until after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The following account of playhouses and players in this period is especially concerned to illustrate the changes and developments that took place in the theatres during the passage of nearly a century. It is divided into four sections: the first deals with the growth of the 'public' or arena theatres; the second is concerned with the earlier 'private' or indoor playhouses; the third describes the later private theatres after 1615, and their relation to the surviving arena stages; and the last focuses on the companies that played in the various theatres, and the business of acting.

¹ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*.

The arena theatres

By the time Queen Elizabeth came to the throne a tradition of playing, both by adult groups of players and by companies of boys, was well established. A number of adult groups toured the major towns of England giving performances, without having any regular schedule or theatre buildings in which to play. A longstanding tradition of including the acting of plays in a humanist education for grammar-school boys led to boys' companies providing a major part of the entertainment at court during the Christmas season, and at Shrovetide. Plays had been staged at court for festive occasions since the reign of Henry VII, and Queen Elizabeth maintained the custom. During the early years of her reign up to 1576, performances at court by boys outnumbered those by adult groups. After 1576 professional companies of adult players became far more important, and began to establish their own permanent playhouses in London. I shall deal with these playhouses first.

In the early years of Elizabeth's reign groups of players performed where they could, occasionally indoors in halls to provide entertainment at court or in great houses, but more frequently in public in the square or rectangular yards of a number of inns in the city of London, the galleries round the yards being used by spectators. The companies were all licensed by the patronage of some great lord to travel and perform, for, if unlicensed, they were, according to a statute of 1598, technically deemed 'Rogues Vagabonds and Sturdy Beggars'.² The civic authorities of the city of London generally showed hostility to players, whom they saw as a nuisance, promoting crowds and disorder, and distracting people, especially apprentices, from their proper occupations, as well as from divine service on Sundays. Following a prohibition of 1559, which does not seem to have had much effect, the Common Council of London in December 1574 banned performances in taverns in the city unless innkeepers were licensed and the plays first subjected to strict supervision and censorship.³

We do not know how effective such prohibitions were, for they did not altogether stop playing at the Bull in Bishopsgate, or at the Bell in Gracechurch Street, where performances continued for another decade or more; however, they may have stimulated entrepreneurs to borrow money and build the first professional playhouses outside the jurisdiction of the city authorities. The earliest was the Red Lion, erected east of London in Stepney in 1567 by John Brayne, brother-in-law of James Burbage, who, with Brayne, built the Theatre in 1576. Not much is known about the Red Lion, except that it had

² Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, iv.324.

³ *Ibid.*, iv.273-6; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 73-7.

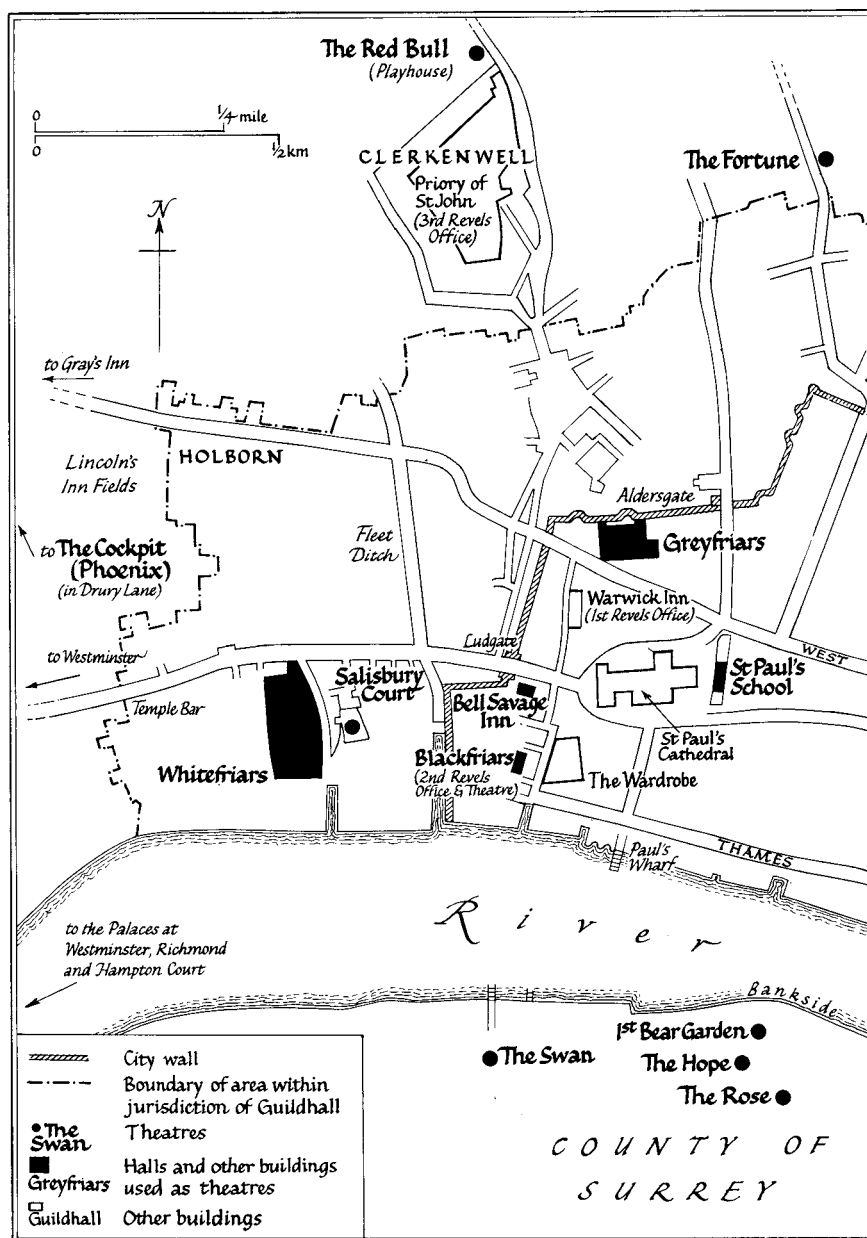
a large stage, surrounded by galleries, and a 'turret' thirty feet high, with a floor made seven feet below the top.⁴ James Burbage was father of the actor, Richard Burbage, who later played leading roles in many of Shakespeare's plays. The Theatre and the Curtain (built in 1577) were located to the north of the city limits (see pp. 4–5). Within a few years a fourth playhouse was built in Newington, well to the south of the Thames, and then a fifth with the erection of the Rose on Bankside in 1587. By this date it seems that performances were being offered daily, if the account of a German visitor to London in 1585 can be trusted.⁵ The new theatres appeared sumptuous to visitors and to puritan critics of the stage, and they were evidently much more luxurious than the inn-yards which they superseded.

The city's attempt to restrain playing in inn-yards thus contributed to the development of fully professional companies playing regularly on most days, except in Lent, or in times of plague, in purpose-built theatres. The immediate success of the new theatres can be measured to some extent by the anxieties they provoked; indeed, by 1583, Philip Stubbes, disclaiming any hostility to theatres and plays in general, nevertheless voiced what had already become a regular complaint, that people flocked to 'Theatres and curtains' when 'the church of God shall be bare and empty'.⁶ Stubbes's reference to the Theatre and the Curtain shows that the current centre of theatrical activity was Shoreditch, a north-east suburb. The playhouses here were a long way from the heart of the old city of London, which lay close to the River Thames. There had been arenas for bull- and bear-baiting south of the Thames on Bankside for many years, and the Beargarden there remained in business until 1613. So when the Rose was also built on Bankside in 1587, there were plenty of 'watermen' to ferry spectators over the river, and it may have been easier to cross the river by boat or by London Bridge than to ride or walk out to the north. With the erection of the Swan on Bankside in 1595, this area became a major focus of theatrical activity. The river formed the southern boundary here of the city limits, so that the Bankside stages too were beyond the control of the city council.

A Flemish visitor to London in 1596 described the Swan as the largest and most splendid of the London theatres. In 1592, and again in 1595, the owner of the Rose, Philip Henslowe, spent substantial sums on repairing, improving, and extending his theatre (see p. 13). It is probable that the wooden Theatre and Curtain were in disrepair and obsolescent by this time, after nearly twenty years of use. Burbage had taken a lease on the site of the Theatre for twenty-one years in 1576, and had difficulty in his attempts to

⁴ See Janet Loengard, 'An Elizabethan lawsuit: John Brayne, his carpenter, and the building of the Red Lion theatre', *SQ* 34 (1983), 298–310; Ingram, *The Business of Playing*, pp. 92–115.

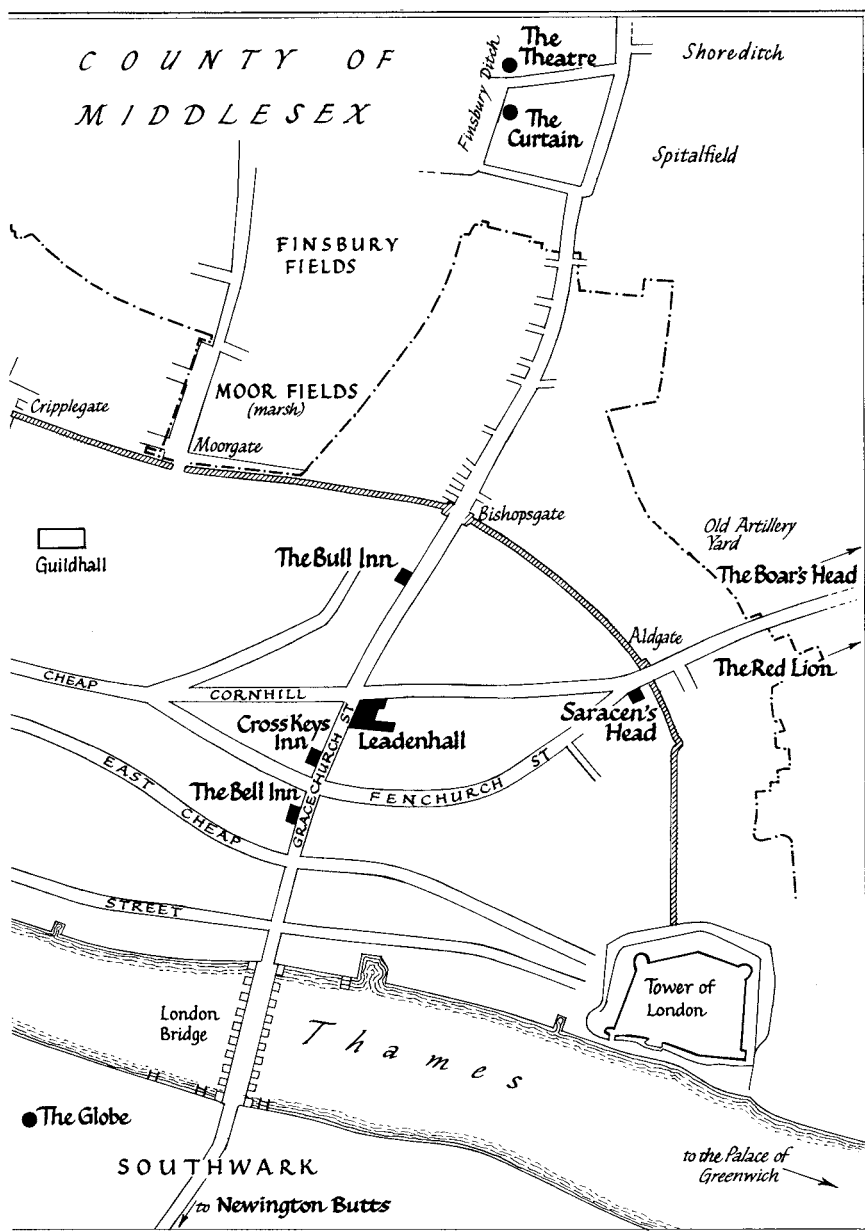
⁵ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.358. ⁶ *Ibid.*, IV.223.



1 Map showing principal public and private theatres, other locations important to theatrical regulation and performance, and some main topographical features of London,

c. 1560-1640

Playhouses and players

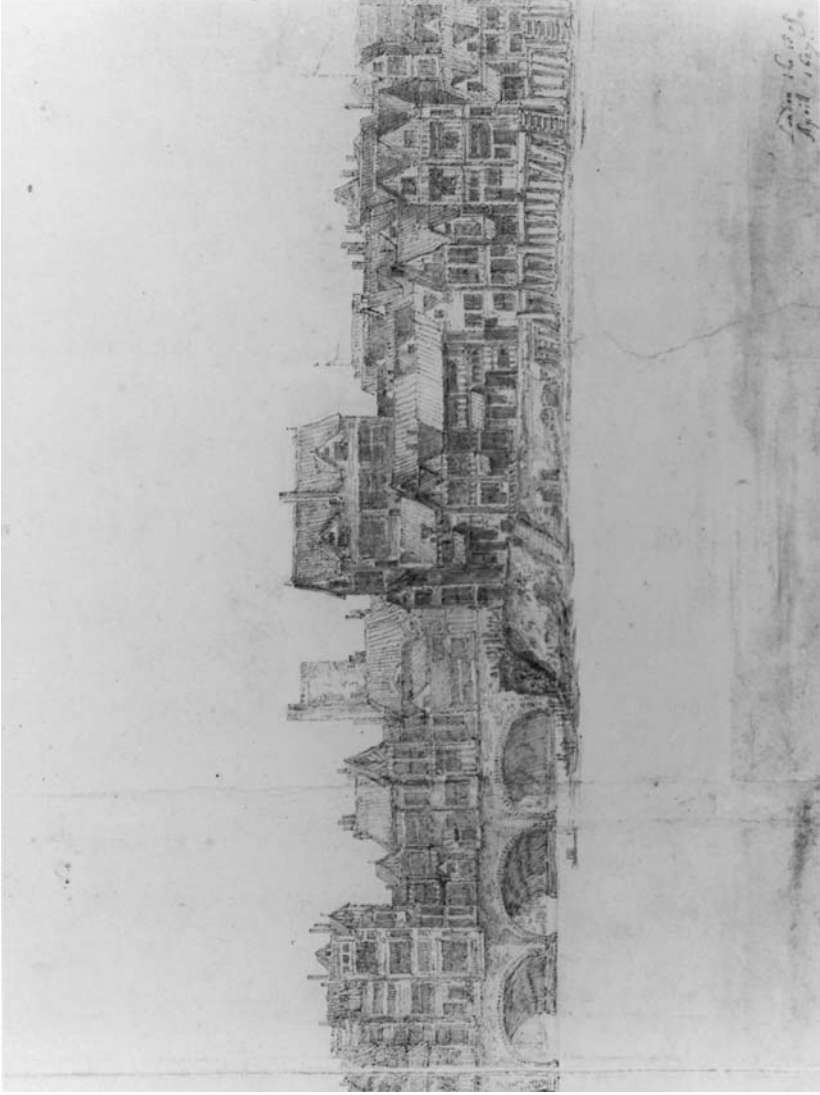


I (cont.)

renew it. Foreseeing the need to make a move, in 1596 Burbage acquired space in the precinct of the old Blackfriars monastery, which, although it lay within the city walls (see pp. 4–5), retained certain privileges as a ‘liberty’ exempt from city control: but Burbage’s idea of turning his newly acquired property into a ‘common playhouse’ was frustrated by the local inhabitants, who petitioned the Privy Council to prevent him. Burbage’s way out was to take a lease on a site on Bankside, dismantle the Theatre, and use those timbers that could be salvaged in the construction there of a new playhouse, the Globe, which was in operation by 1599. In the summer of 1597, the performance at the Swan of a play by Thomas Nashe, *The Isle of Dogs* (now lost), containing lewd and seditious matters, led to the arrest of three men, including Ben Jonson, who had been involved in the production, and provoked the Privy Council to order a ‘restraint’ prohibiting the performance of plays within three miles of the city.⁷ A more serious effect of the affair of *The Isle of Dogs* was that Francis Langley, the owner of the Swan, could not obtain a licence to stage plays there when the restraint was lifted in the autumn; after this time the Swan never seems to have been able to attract and retain a regular company of players, although it continued to be used for other kinds of shows and entertainments.

For a brief period in 1599 the two most important companies of players operated on Bankside, where the Rose and the Globe drew audiences across the river. The most settled and prosperous companies were the Lord Chamberlain’s Men, who played at the Globe, and the Lord Admiral’s Men, who played at the Rose. The increased competition brought by the presence of the new Globe, the dilapidation of the Rose, now an ageing playhouse, and the fact that his lease was due to expire in 1605, drove Philip Henslowe to seek a replacement. In 1600 he opened his new theatre, the Fortune, in a northern suburb, beyond Cripplegate (see pp. 4–5) but well to the west of the Shoreditch area where the old Theatre had stood, and where the Curtain was still operating in spite of the Privy Council order for its dismantling. The city was spreading west and north, and the Fortune stood within convenient walking distance for a growing population. A little earlier Robert Browne had established a company at the Boar’s Head, in Whitechapel, outside the eastern limits of the city, where an inn was converted into a theatre in 1599, with a stage in the inn-yard, and galleries along each side of the rectangular yard. Here a strong company, formed by the amalgamation of the Earl of Worcester’s Men and Lord Oxford’s Men, was playing in 1602. Browne died

⁷ R. A. Foakes and R. T. Rickert, *Henslowe’s Diary*, p. 240; but see also Ingram, *A London Life in the Brazen Age: Francis Langley 1548–1602* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 167–96 and Gurr, *Companies*, pp. 107–9.



2 Claude de Jongh's sketch of London Bridge, 1627; detail showing the roof-lines and flags of the Hope or Beargarden and the Globe

of the plague in 1603, and was succeeded by Thomas Greene, but perhaps the venture was never a success; no plays can certainly be identified with this theatre, and the company moved in 1605 to a new playhouse, the Red Bull, in the same area as the Fortune, but a little further north-west, in Clerkenwell (see p. 4). The Red Bull had been an inn too, but it is always referred to as a playhouse or theatre after 1605, and perhaps what took place here was not a conversion, in the manner of the Boar's Head,⁸ but rather a virtual reconstruction.

The Red Bull was the last arena theatre to be built, apart from the Hope. The Hope was designed as a dual-purpose place of entertainment, doubling as a bear-baiting arena and a theatre, and it replaced the old Beargarden on Bankside, torn down in 1613. Of the older theatres, that furthest south, at Newington Butts, seems to have fallen into disuse by 1595; the Theatre was dismantled in 1598, and the Rose demolished probably by 1606. After its brief period of success from about 1595 to 1597, the Swan, located furthest west of the Bankside theatres, and less accessible than the others from London Bridge, ceased to be in regular use as a theatre; although performances were revived there between 1611 and 1615, it seems thereafter to have been used only for 'feats of activity' (see below, pp. 12–13), and had fallen into decay by 1632. The Hope opened with some éclat in the autumn of 1614, when Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* was presented there, but from about 1617 onwards it functioned mainly as a house for the baiting of bears and bulls, and for the exhibition of exotic animals. The history of the Curtain is obscure after 1607, apart from a few years between 1621 and 1625, when it was in use as a playhouse, but, as far as is known, no plays were staged there after 1625.

The remaining open-air theatres, the Globe (burned down in 1613 and rebuilt), the Fortune (burned down in 1621 and rebuilt), and the Red Bull, all continued in operation until Parliament closed the theatres in 1642. Throughout the period from 1576 to 1642, substantial audiences were drawn to these large theatres. As far as we know, each of them had a stage projecting into an arena partly open to the skies, and surrounded by three tiers of galleries. According to Thomas Platter, a Swiss visitor who saw *Julius Caesar* performed at the Globe in September 1599, the spectator paid one penny to stand in the arena, another penny to sit in a gallery, and a penny more 'to sit on a cushion in the most comfortable place of all, where he not only sees everything well, but can also be seen'.⁹ Prices of admission increased in later

⁸ As Wickham thinks, *Early English Stages*, II.2.108.

⁹ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.365; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 412–13.

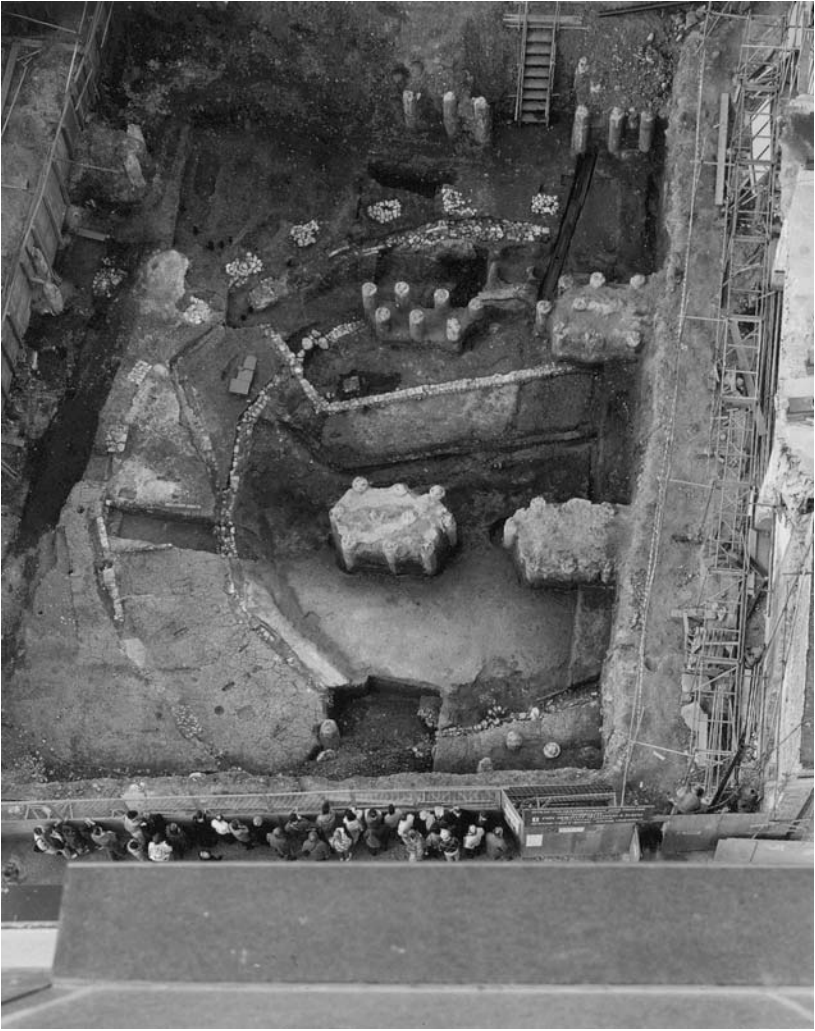
years, and the theatres were made more comfortable: the surviving contract for the Fortune called for ‘gentlemen’s rooms’ and ‘twopenny rooms’ to be plastered.¹⁰ These rooms were either in the gallery over the rear of the stage, or in sections of the main galleries – perhaps those sections closest to the stage were partitioned off to make ‘twopenny rooms’. Wherever these rooms were (see below, p. 17), the evidence shows that the playhouses provided a hierarchy of accommodations in the expectation that the audience would be socially and economically diversified. There are a number of instances of dramatists joking with the ‘understanding gentlemen o’ the ground’ (Ben Jonson, Induction to *Bartholomew Fair*), or sneering at them, as in Hamlet’s snobbishly caustic comments on the ‘groundlings’ as capable only of ‘inexplicable dumb-shows and noise’. It seems that arena spectators might also throw eggs or apples at players if they disliked the entertainment (Prologue to *The Hog hath Lost his Pearl*, 1613). However uneducated, and however much they may have preferred fights, noise, and clowning to serious drama, the groundlings remained an important part of the audience, and the arena theatres continued to cater to them.¹¹

These playhouses were all similar in their basic conception, which is to say that all were relatively large arena theatres, accommodating probably between 2,000 and upwards of 3,000 spectators. Many of the detailed arrangements remain a matter of speculation, however, and not only did these theatres differ from one another in important ways, but over the years it seems that many structural changes were introduced. The early theatres were built of wood, probably, as the Fortune contract specifies, on piles and foundations of brick. Flint may have been used for the Swan, but the evidence is conflicting; and, like the others, this theatre appeared round, so that Johannes De Witt, visiting London in 1596, could describe all four theatres he saw (Theatre, Curtain, Rose, Swan) as ‘amphiteatra’.¹² We now know that the Rose was multi-sided (see pp. 10–11), and no doubt the other wood-framed theatres were similarly constructed. This would explain why, on some maps (none of them authoritative), they are represented as polygonal, usually hexagonal or octagonal. Current research suggests that the playhouses had many more sides: the Rose, with a diameter of about 74 feet, had fourteen, and the much larger Globe, thought to have had a diameter of about 100 feet, may have had twenty or twenty-four.¹³ The design of the theatres can be related to the circular arenas for bear- and bull-baiting which

¹⁰ Henslowe’s *Diary*, p. 308. ¹¹ Gurr, *Playgoing*, pp. 73–80.

¹² Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II, 362.

¹³ John Orrell, *The Quest for Shakespeare’s Globe* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 160–1, and see Julian Bowsher, *The Rose Theatre: An Archaeological Discovery* (London, 1998).



3 The Rose theatre excavation

The illustration shows the remains of the Rose theatre exposed when excavation halted in May 1989. Much of the ground-plan of the playhouse can be seen, although parts of it to the east and south remain unexcavated, and some other features have been obliterated by the sets of piles driven through for a building put up in the 1950s. The Rose was built for Philip Henslowe in 1587 as a slightly irregular polygonal building. To the north-west only eight pile-caps survive to show the line of the original outer wall, but enough of the chalk and stone footings of the outer and inner walls of the theatre have been exposed to show that it had fourteen sides or bays. The straight sections of the outer wall measure between 15 feet and 16 feet 6 inches, those of the inner wall just over 11 feet, and the depth of each bay, i.e., the distance between the outer and inner walls, was 10 feet 6 inches. The playhouse had an external diameter of about 74 feet, was smaller than the Fortune, built to replace it in 1600 (4,500 square feet ground area,

had stood on Bankside for decades,¹⁴ but they appeared to some visitors to London to resemble the structure of ancient Roman amphitheatres.¹⁵

Only one drawing survives of the interior of an arena playhouse, a copy by Aernout van Buchell of a sketch of the Swan theatre made in 1596 by Johannes De Witt (see p. 14). This shows the large projecting rectangular stage, with a canopy over it supported by two columns. At the rear of the stage is the wall of the tiring-house, with two large, round-arched rustic doors in it providing entrances on to the stage. Above this wall is a gallery partitioned into six bays. The drawing also clumsily incorporates a hut apparently above and behind the canopy over the stage, with a trumpeter blowing as if to announce a performance, and a flag flying, with the house emblem on it.

¹⁴ Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 2–3.

¹⁵ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.362, 366; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 441.

excluding the galleries, as against 6,400 square feet), and considerably smaller than the Globe, if that was as large as many now think (about 7,800 square feet ground area).

The open-air arena inside the inner walls was covered with impervious mortar, most of which is still in place. The northern section is confusing because the theatre was extended and partly rebuilt at some point, probably in 1592, when Henslowe recorded large expenses for work that included breaking up, buying bricks and chalk, putting in rafters, bricklaying, thatching, plastering, painting the stage, and setting up a penthouse shed at the tiring-house door (*Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 9–13). The extension involved erecting a new stage, and enlarged the capacity of the arena and galleries. The earlier stage is marked by a plinth running roughly east-west, and it tapered towards the front, where it was 24 feet 9 inches wide; at the rear it measured 37 feet 6 inches wide, and it had a maximum depth of 15 feet 6 inches. It was thus smaller than the stage at the Fortune, which the contract specified could be 43 feet wide and extend to the middle of the yard. The rear wall seems to have been the inner frame of the polygon, so that the stage was very different from the rectangular one depicted by De Witt at the Swan, with its straight rear screen or *frons scenae* (see p. 14).

North of the outline of the earlier stage can be seen the clunch or soft stone footings of a second stage of a similar shape, built when the theatre was extended. The front of it is set back 6 feet 6 inches from the earlier stage. A base, presumably for a column, has been found in the south-west corner of the later stage, and may be evidence of support for a cover over the stage. If so, the boards of the platform would need to have extended beyond the perimeter marked by the footings to allow an actor to pass in front of it. Both stages were oriented roughly south, so that they would have the even light of shade when plays were performed during the afternoon. An erosion trench visible in the mortar of the arena indicates where water fell from the thatched roof above the galleries. On the west side two parallel partition walls may mark a passage for access to the arena, but the main entrance may have been on the south side, opposite centre-stage. No evidence has yet been found of the tiring-house, which was probably located in the bays behind the stage.

Further analysis will no doubt reveal more details (see Julian Bowsher, *The Rose Theatre: An Archaeological Discovery* (London, 1998), pp. 28–57), but the basic information outlined here is already startling in many ways. The Rose was different from the Swan and the Globe, and its smaller auditorium requires us to think of a capacity of the order of 2,000 spectators rather than 3,000 or more as at the Globe. The information is thus of great importance, for it is the first reliable evidence we have about the Elizabethan arena theatres, and it challenges some assumptions that have long been taken for granted.

No spectators are shown in the galleries or the arena, and the only figures portrayed are three actors on stage and one or two persons in each bay of the gallery at the rear of the stage. The figures on stage and the bench drawn there could be an artist's invention to decorate that otherwise blank space, or they may have been recollected from some performance. The figures in the gallery may indicate gentlemen in the 'gentlemen's rooms', or, again, may be decorative. The stage itself seems to float above two openings where curtains have been partly drawn, but these could also be interpreted as columns supporting the stage. The drawing does not show a performance taking place; some have thought it depicts a rehearsal, but this is improbable, for there would be other persons at a rehearsal, the book-holder or prompter, other members of the company, and those who managed or directed productions. The details of the drawing are difficult to interpret, and of uncertain reliability, and I think the sketch needs to be treated with scepticism, not accepted 'at its face value',¹⁶ or as 'generally reliable'.¹⁷

The Swan (1595) was the first of the second generation of purpose-built theatres, and may well have been the largest and most splendid of the playhouses when it was erected, as De Witt observed,¹⁸ but it was probably different from the Globe and Fortune in important respects. The contract for the Fortune shows that it imitated features of the Globe,¹⁹ but when Philip Henslowe went on to erect the Hope in 1613–14 as a replacement for the Beorgarden, the contract he drew up for it specifically calls for a design similar to that of the Swan.²⁰ The explanation for this is probably that the Swan itself was a dual-purpose playhouse and game-house,²¹ with a removable stage, which would have made possible the use of the entire arena for the 'feats of activity' one Peter Bromville was licensed to put on there in 1600. There is no evidence that the Swan was used for animal-baiting, but there is little evidence, either, that it was used for plays between 1597 and 1611. In February 1602 a man was accidentally killed while taking part in a fencing match held there.²² A spectacular entertainment was advertised as taking place there in November 1602 (see below, p. 13), but this proved to be a hoax. The Swan, then, was little used after 1597; only one play (Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, 1613; printed 1630) is

¹⁶ Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.1.204.

¹⁷ Hosley, 'Playhouses' in *The Revels History of Drama in English*, vol. III (1576–1613) (London, 1975), p. 136.

¹⁸ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.362; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 441.

¹⁹ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.437; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 535.

²⁰ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.466–7; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 598.

²¹ Wickham, *Early English Stages*; II.2.68–9.

²² Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.413; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 448.

certainly known to have been acted there, and the Hope, modelled on it, seems pretty well to have put it out of business. It is reasonable to infer that the Swan was more like the Hope than the other theatres on Bankside. The Hope itself proved to be more successful as a game-house than as a playhouse.

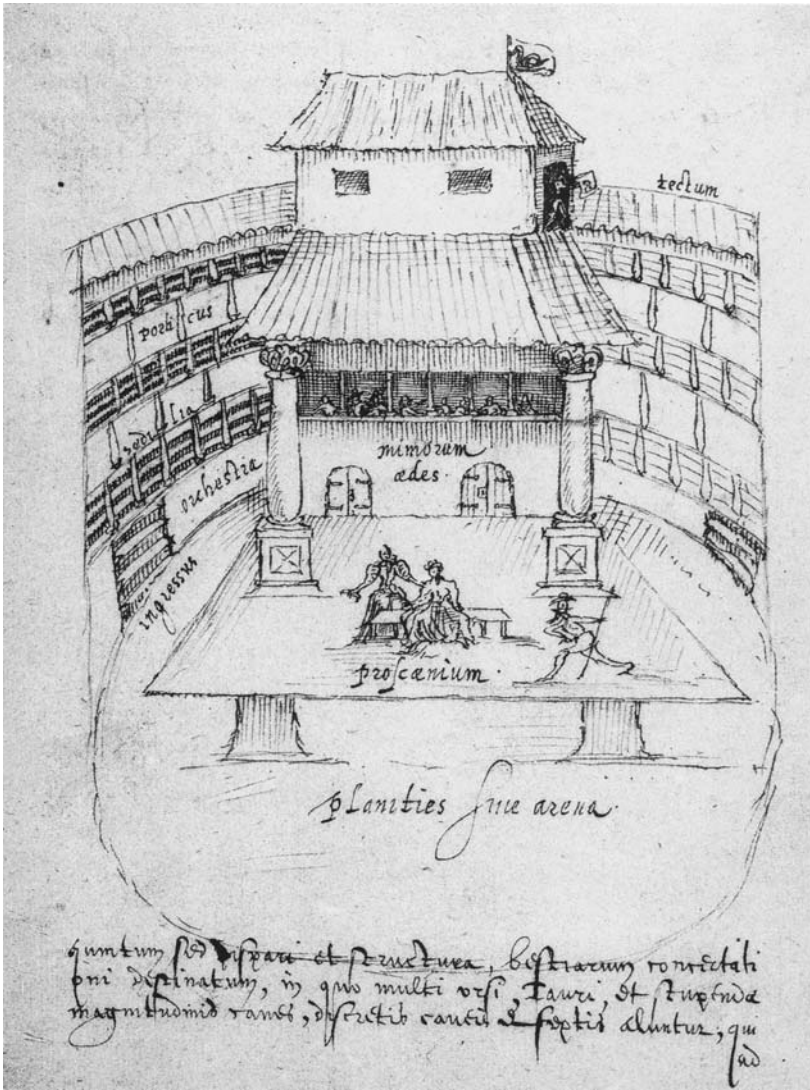
The simpler facilities of the dual-purpose houses may have made them less and less attractive as theatres during a period when the playhouses were gradually becoming more elaborate and comfortable. Accommodation in the early playhouses seems to have been Spartan for most spectators, and probably for actors too. Henslowe plastered and put ceilings into the gentlemen's rooms at the Rose in 1592, and improved the tiring-house facilities by adding a penthouse. In 1595, he had a 'throne' made in the 'heavens',²³ presumably a machine to make it possible to lower a throne, and perhaps other properties, on to the stage; he also made substantial renovations at this time. The De Witt drawing of the Swan has perpetuated the idea of the Elizabethan theatres as having a bare stage and minimal facilities, but other evidence suggests rather that their accommodation and equipment were continually being improved. They were a tourist attraction for foreign visitors, who, like the puritan critics of the stage, frequently remarked on the magnificence of the buildings. So De Witt himself noted the beauty (*'pulchritudinis'*) of the four theatres in 1596, and Thomas Platter in 1599 observed that the players were 'most expensively and elegantly apparelled'.²⁴ In November 1602 Richard Vennar lured a large audience to the Swan on a Saturday by advertising an elaborate entertainment called 'England's Joy'; but, according to a letter written by John Chamberlain, 'the common people, when they saw themselves deluded, revenged themselves upon the hangings, curtains, chairs, stools, walls, and whatsoever came in their way'.²⁵ Apparently the 'great store of good company, and many noblemen' present did not take part in this riot. The curtains and hangings referred to by Chamberlain are not hinted at in De Witt's drawing.

The new Swan struck De Witt as the most splendid of the London theatres in 1596, apparently because it was more richly furnished and decorated than the earlier theatres. The Globe (1599) and Fortune (1600) were no doubt even more elaborate. At the Fortune the main posts of the frame of the theatre and the stage were to be wrought 'pilasterwise', with carved proportions called 'Satyrs' to be placed on the top of each;²⁶ in other words, the columns of the main frame and stage were to be carved so as to represent the appearance of

²³ Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 7. ²⁴ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.362, 365.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, III.501; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 447.

²⁶ Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 308; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 535.



4 Johannes de Witt's sketch of the Swan theatre about 1596, as copied by Aernout van Buchell; see p. 13

one of the classical orders, and decorated with figures, half-man, half-goat, drawn from classical mythology. So not only were the stage posts classical in appearance (perhaps like the Corinthian columns supporting the canopy in the De Witt drawing), but also the main posts of the entire frame. These features could explain why foreign visitors like Thomas Platter thought of the Bankside playhouse they visited as constructed in the style of an ancient

THE PLOT OF THE PLAY, CALLED
ENGLANDS JOY.

To be Playd at the Swan this 6. of Nouember. 1602.






IRST, there is induc'd by shew and in Action, the ciuill warres of England from *Edward the third*, to the end of *Queene Marius* raigne, with the ouerthrow of Vsurpation.

2 Secondly then the entrance of *Englands Joy* by the Coronation of our Soueraigne Lady *Elsabeth*, her Throne attended with peace, Plenty, and ciuill Pollicy: A sacred Prelate standing at her right hand, betokening the Serenity of the Gospell: At her left hand Iustice: And at her feete Warre, with a Scarlet Roabe of peace vpon his Armour: A wreath of Bayes about his temples, and a branch of Palme in his hand.

3 Thirdly is dragd in three Faries, presenting Diffention, Famine, and Bloudshed, which are throwne downe into hell.

4 Fourthly is exprest vnder the person of a Tyrant, the enuy of *Spain*, who to shew his cruelty causeth his Souldiers dragge in a beautifull Lady, whome they mangle and wound, tearing her garments and Jewels from off her: And so leaue her blondy, with her hayre about her shoulders, lying vpon the ground. To her come certaine Gentlemen, who seeing her pitious dispoymment, turne to the Throne of England, from whence one descendeth, taketh vp the Lady, wipeth her eyes, Bindeth vp her woundes, giueth her treasure, and bringeth forth a band of Souldiers, who attend her forth: This Lady presenteth *Belgia*.

5 Fifthly, the Tyrant more enraged, taketh counsell, sends forth letters, priuie Spies, and secret vnderminers, taking their othes, and giuing them bagges of treasure. These signifie *Lopus*, and certaine Iesuites, who afterward, when the Tyrant looks for an answere from them, are shewed to him in a glasse with halters about their neckes, which makes him mad with fury.

6 Sixtly, the Tyrant seeing all secret meanes to fayle him, intendeth open violence and inuasion by the hand of Warre, whereupon is set forth the battle at Sea in 88. with *Englands* victory.

7 Seuenthly, hee complotteth with the Irish rebelles, wherein is layd open the base ingratitude of *Tyrone*, the landing there of *Don Iohn de Aquila*, and their dissipation by the wisedome and valour of the Lord *Mountray*.

8 Eightly, a great triumph is made with fighting of twelue Gentlemen at Barriers, and sundrie rewards sent from the Throne of England, to all fortes of well deseruers.

9 Lastly, the Nine Worthies, with seuerall Coronets, present themselves before the Throne, which are put backe by certaine in the habite of Angels, who set vpon the Ladies head, which represents her Maiesie, an Imperiall Crowne, garnished with the *Sunne*, *Moon* and *Starres*; And so with Musicke both with voyce and Instruments thee is taken vp into Heauen, when presently appears, a Throne of blessed Soules, and beneath vnder the Stage set forth with strange fire-works, diners blacke and damned Soules, wonderfully discrib'd in their feuerall torments.



5 The playbill for Richard Vennar's hoax entertainment, *England's Joy*, 1602; see p. 13

Roman amphitheatre. The internal façade of the stage and the whole theatre at the Fortune, built in emulation of the Globe, must have been imposing. The 'cover' over the stage was perhaps initially a simple canopy, designed to protect actors, properties, and hangings from the worst of the weather; it was painted on the underside with a representation of the sun, moon, stars, and zodiac, and known as 'the heavens'. The Swan seems to have had such a canopy, and a removable stage; but at the Globe and Fortune, the canopy was probably more substantial, and it may have been practicable to use the space between the sloping roof of the 'shadow or cover', as it is called in the Fortune contract, and a flat ceiling laid under it, for windlasses and machinery for lowering people and properties on to the stage.²⁷ Such machinery could easily have been accommodated at the second Globe, which had a cover surmounted by spacious twin-gabled roofs, and extending almost to the centre of the arena.²⁸

The stage was 'paled in' with strong oak boards at the Fortune, and the area underneath was jocularly known as 'hell'. The use of at least one large trapdoor made possible various kinds of startling appearances, like the devil that rises from the stage in Scene 3 of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. George Chapman's *All Fools*, written probably in 1599 for performance by the Admiral's Men, was printed in 1605 with a prologue designed for the Fortune that calls attention to the startling nature of the stage effects made possible by the use of the stage-hell and stage-heavens:

The fortune of a Stage (like Fortune's self)
 Amazeth greatest judgments; and none knows
 The hidden causes of those strange effects
 That rise from this Hell, or fall from this Heaven.

We know least about the appearance of the stage façade, i.e., the tiring-house wall at the rear of the stage. The drawing of the Swan shows two doors in an otherwise flat screen wall, perhaps an echo of the two doors common in the screens in the domestic halls of colleges and private houses, from which Richard Hosley thinks the stage façade at the Swan was derived.²⁹ At the Rose, however, the polygonal inner frame of the playhouse served as the rear wall of the stage, and the stage façades at the Globe and Fortune were more elaborate than that indicated in the Swan drawing. It is reasonable to suppose that the neo-classical moulding of the columns at the Fortune was carried through the stage façade, in imitation of the Globe. At these theatres there were three stage doors or openings; so, for instance, Thomas Heywood's

²⁷ Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.1.304–5.

²⁸ Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 37. ²⁹ Hosley, 'Playhouses', p. 131.

play, *The Four Prentices of London* (Fortune, c. 1600), begins with a prologue specifying 'Enter three in black cloaks, at three doors.'

At the Swan a gallery ran the width of the stage above the doors, and was partitioned into six 'rooms', if De Witt's drawing can be trusted. Here perhaps were the four 'gentlemen's rooms' specified in the Fortune contract; but at the Fortune and Globe, part of this space appears to have been set aside for musicians and for stage action requiring an upper level. The gallery overhung the stage, and hangings mounted on rods affixed to this projection could be used to conceal actors as required behind the 'arras' (see below, p. 19). The tapestries or curtains hung on the stage could, of course, be decorative or symbolic, and there are several references to using black hangings for tragedies;³⁰ they could also be drawn across one of the doors or openings to make possible discovery scenes. Occasionally, as in Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (Rose, c. 1590), a character in the play draws the curtain himself. The Fortune contract also calls for 'convenient windows and lights glazed' to the tiring-house;³¹ and since the tiring-house was to be built within the frame of the theatre, these windows and lights may have been in the tiring-house wall facing the stage. Although there are many references to action taking place at windows, the question of their physical reality is part of a larger problem that may be unresolvable.

The problem, briefly stated, is this: for much of our knowledge about playhouses of the period we depend upon the evidence provided by the stage directions and action of the plays staged there; where the action refers to posts on the stage, or requires three men to enter at different doors, we take this as evidence about the posts and doors which we know must have been there. Beyond such requirements is a grey area where the objects or locations could have been real, or simply imagined; windows perhaps belong in this category. Then there are plays in which the rear wall of the stage serves as the battlements of a city under siege, or a castle, or houses and shops in a street, or a forest, a seashore, or whatever the dramatist declares it to be. I know of no way to establish a boundary between what was done in practice on the stages of the public playhouses, and what was left to the imagination. Many scholars take a minimalist view, and, believing the Swan to be typical, tend to assume that any feature mentioned in the text or stage directions of a play is to be imagined by the audience unless it is indicated in the Swan drawing. I think, for reasons already indicated, that the Swan was not typical, and was superseded by better-equipped theatres such as the Globe and Fortune. Later theatres certainly had practical windows at the rear or sides of the stage, and

³⁰ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III.79.

³¹ *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 308; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 535.

the Fortune contract would suggest that these were provided there, on the gallery level, along with 'lights' or gratings in the stage doors.

This problem reminds us that the evidence is not easy to interpret, and that all students of the Elizabethan theatres have to rely on some element of speculation. I believe myself that Elizabethan theatres, like modern ones, offered as lavish and brilliant spectacles as they could create. Certainly the costuming could be magnificent; Henslowe, for instance, spent £21, a huge sum then, on velvet, satin, and taffeta for a single play on Cardinal Wolsey (by Henry Chettle; now lost) in 1601.³² His accounts for this period show that the Fortune company regularly spent large sums on new costumes and properties. An inventory of the costumes of this company made in 1598 confirms contemporary comments on how the players strutted in some splendour on their stages: the list includes numerous items of apparel in satin, taffeta, and cloth of gold; also cloaks, jerkins, breeches, and doublets of various colours, white, tawny, silver, red, black, green, yellow, orange, many of them trimmed with 'gold' (usually copper, as Henslowe's accounts show) or silver lace.³³ Henslowe's payments suggest that they had some concern for an appearance of historical authenticity in costuming plays on recent or contemporary themes (like the lost *Cardinal Wolsey*), but the players were less troubled by historical accuracy in presenting plays on topics drawn from earlier times. The drawing by Henry Peacham of characters in *Titus Andronicus* shows a mixture of costumes: soldiers are dressed in Elizabethan armour, and other figures in tunics appropriate to ancient Rome.³⁴

The players also made use of an elaborate range of properties. Henslowe's 1598 inventory³⁵ includes tombs, a chariot, a bedstead, and other properties fairly often used, but also two steeples, several trees, two moss-banks, a hell-mouth, and the city of Rome. The last item may have been a painted hanging, but we do not know how other properties were managed, or to what extent the players tried to provide settings for their plays. The openings in the tiring-house wall could be made to serve as various locations, and some indications or representations of the scene were certainly employed. So, for instance, Thomas Middleton's *The Roaring Girl* (Fortune, c. 1610) calls for three shops in a row, an apothecary's, a feather shop, and a sempster's shop.

Plain-coloured hangings were also used, and the stage was customarily 'hung with black' (Induction, *A Warning for Fair Women*; Theatre/Globe, printed 1599) for tragedies; but painted cloths adorned the stage for other

³² *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 179.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 321–3; see also Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, pp. 178–83.

³⁴ Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 50. ³⁵ *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 319–21.

plays, and Ben Jonson refers to the ‘fresh pictures, that use to beautify the decayed dead arras, in a public theatre’ (*Cynthia’s Revels*; Blackfriars, 1601). In a later play that mockingly alludes to the public theatres, Beaumont’s *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (?Blackfriars, 1607), a joke is made out of an incongruous cloth painted with a representation of the rape of Lucrece. The Jonson allusion suggests that the ‘arras’ or heavy tapestry may have been a permanent feature, and that painted cloths were hung over this when desired. If scenes were generally unlocalized, the imagined locality being indicated in the text, hangings nevertheless could be used to provide an appropriate background; and the curtains could be parted to suggest interior scenes, and allow beds, tables, and other properties to be brought forth or revealed as necessary for the action of a play. Frequently a tableau discovered by opening the curtains dissolves as the participants move out on to the main stage. Remarkable effects could be obtained, as when, after a series of battle scenes, 2 *Tamburlaine*, 2.4 (Rose, 1588) opens with the direction: ‘The Arras is drawn, and Zenocrate lies in her bed of state, Tamburlaine sitting by her; three Physicians about her bed, tempering potions. Theridamas, Techelles and Usumcasane, and the three sons’. The moment of stasis here at the beginning of the death scene of Tamburlaine’s great love halts the flow of action, achieving a visual pathos.

The first part of Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine* (Rose, 1587) is famous for its visual effects; Tamburlaine transforms himself from a shepherd into a king, and later changes his costume according to his mood and intentions, from white to scarlet to black, and in 4.4 hangs his ‘bloody colours’ on the tiring-house wall, which serves as the city walls of Damascus. There the citizens ‘walk quivering on their city walls’ (4.4.3), perhaps on the ‘tarras’ or narrow ledge or balcony projecting from the gallery at the rear of the stage. Many plays make use of the different levels of the stage, turning the tiring-house wall into battlements which could be scaled with ladders, or from which proclamations of victory could be announced. The text of 1 *Tamburlaine* also refers to Tamburlaine’s ‘tents of white’ and ‘vermilion tent’ (4.2.III, II7); it is not certain that these were shown on stage in this play (were the tents real or imagined?), though in *Part 2* the stage direction for 4.1 calls for two characters to enter ‘from the tent where Calyphas sits asleep’. Practical tents or pavilions were set up for many plays, with doors or openings allowing for display within, as the stage direction in *Edward I* (Theatre, 1591), l.1932, suggests: ‘the king sits in his tent with his pages about him’. During the 1580s and 1590s battle scenes were very popular, and in some plays two or more tents were pitched, as most famously in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (Theatre, 1593) where the tents of the leaders of the opposing armies, Richard and Richmond, are set up on stage in 5.3.

Many different kinds of spectacular effect could be contrived by the use of hangings, of practicable tents, scaffolds, arbours, chairs of state, beds, ladders, trees, and other objects brought on stage, or thrust through the trap-door. The use of fireworks also made possible such effects as the display of lightning, or the effect of a blazing star. The open-air theatres also made much use of loud noises, of trumpets and drums, and the shooting of guns. Processions and dumbshows enlivened scenes with visual effects that could often be striking; so in *Captain Thomas Stukeley* (Rose/Fortune, ?1595; printed 1605), a dumbshow or pantomime in which the hero dithers between joining forces with the Spanish or the Portuguese, then decides to ally himself with the Portuguese, ends ‘and so both armie[s] meeting embrace, when with a sudden thunder-clap the sky is one fire, and the blazing star appears, which they prognosticating to be fortunate departed very joyful’ (sig. K1r).³⁶ It is often said that ‘Stage business and spectacle of this kind should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the stages themselves were essentially bare’,³⁷ but I believe this claim, based on the Swan drawing, is misleading. The stage façade was highly decorated, and the Elizabethan playhouses offered their public colour, spectacle, and richness. The stage was anything but bare; even the platform itself was covered with rushes, probably in part to deaden the noise of the actors’ movements.

The essential point is that no attempt at scenic illusion was made; the stage-location was whatever the dramatist made his actors say it was. This in itself marks an extraordinary development away from the ‘simultaneous’ staging of medieval theatre that lingered on into the 1590s, notably in plays by Lyly and Peele, mainly written for children to perform, and with presentation at court in mind. The use of three-dimensional structures or ‘houses’ placed in different parts of the stage, or along the rear, to represent different localities, gave way as a general principle to successive staging for audiences that loved romances, histories, and tragedies that ranged freely over the known world, like Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*, or John Day’s *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* (Red Bull, 1607), or Thomas Heywood’s *The Four Prentices of London, with the Siege of Jerusalem* (Rose, ?1594). Parts of the stage could, of course, be identified as particular locations when necessary, as in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (Rose, 1599), where Simon Eyre’s shoemaker’s shop is opened up in 1.4 (‘open my shop windows!’), shut up at 3.2.149, and displayed in 4.1 with ‘Hodge at his shop board’ (stage direction). In 3.4 a ‘sempster’s shop’ is the setting, and probably hinged shutters were made that could serve as windows, and also opened out to form a board or counter. But

³⁶ See Dieter Mehl, *The Elizabethan Dumb Show* (London, 1985), pp. 102–3.

³⁷ Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 191.

when the shops were closed up, the stage became a street, or a rural place, as at the opening of 1.2, where Rose sits 'upon this flow'ry bank' making a garland. It has been argued³⁸ that mansion staging 'was imported intact into the first permanent theatres of Elizabethan London', but I see little evidence to support this claim; indeed, by 1599 the free-ranging spectaculars of the public theatres were drawing the scorn of Ben Jonson, who preferred to observe the neo-classical unities of action and place. In *Every Man out of his Humour* (Globe, 1599), Jonson's commentators on the action pun on the playwright's 'travel':

MITIS ...how comes it then that in some one play we see so many seas,
countries, and kingdoms passed over with such admirable dexterity?

CORDATUS Oh, that but shows how well the authors can travail in their
vocation, and outrun the apprehension of their auditory.

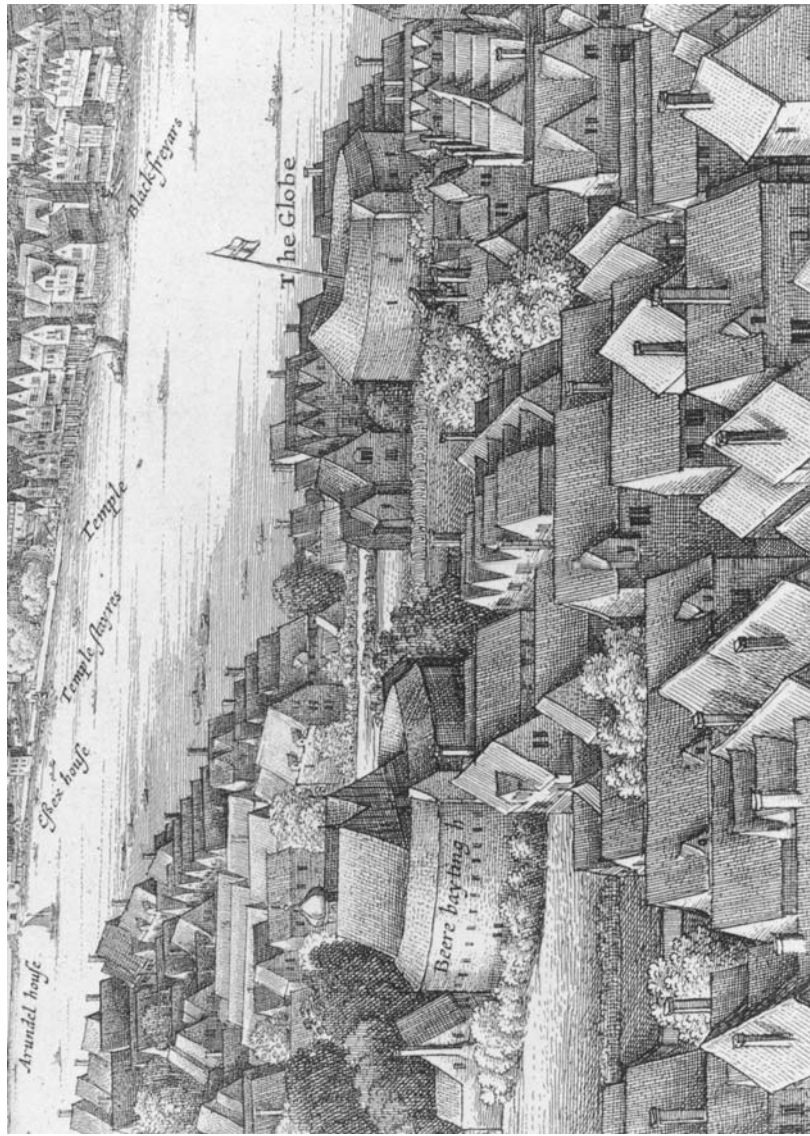
(Induction, 269–72)

As long as the open-air, public theatres had a virtual monopoly on playing, that is, up to about 1600, they may have paid less attention to the comfort of spectators in the arena and galleries than to improvements in the stage area. In the winter especially, the spectators must have been often exposed to cold and damp. If the first Globe had a diameter of about 100 feet,³⁹ then an area of more than 2,000 square feet could have been directly exposed to rain. The new design of the second Globe (1613), as shown in Hollar's 'Long View', included a large roofed area covering all the stage and at least half the arena. This modification reduced the area exposed directly to the sky, and made the galleries, especially those areas near the stage, less vulnerable to the wind and rain. The Fortune, being square and smaller (the sides were 80 feet long), had a much smaller area directly open to the sky, perhaps 1,300 square feet; probably the square or rectangular Red Bull had a similar design. The first Globe was thatched, the second, like the Fortune, tiled. When the Fortune burned down in 1621, it was replaced by a round brick building, 'partly open to the weather',⁴⁰ but no doubt much more enclosed than the early playhouses. There had, of course, to be sufficient daylight for the actors to perform, and some stages appear to have faced north-east, perhaps to ensure an even light without glare or strong contrasts in the stage area.⁴¹

In this respect the arena playhouses of the period 1576–1642 were radically different from modern theatres, in which actors usually appear behind a proscenium arch, under spotlights, in front of an audience sitting in a darkened auditorium. It is a matter of fundamental importance that actor and

³⁸ Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.1.8–9. ³⁹ Orrell, *Quest*, pp. 99–104.

⁴⁰ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.443. ⁴¹ Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 37–8.



6 Hollar's 'Long View of London from Bankside', 1647; section showing the Globe and Beargarden – Hollar has reversed their designations

audience shared the same lighting, and, effectively therefore, the same space in the arena playhouses, since the stage projected into the middle of the building. One reason these theatres stayed in business was that they provided an especially close relationship between actors and audience, with no visual barrier between them, allowing the actor to identify as intimately as he pleased with spectators, or to distance himself within the action. 'Awareness of the illusion as illusion was therefore much closer to the surface all the time.'⁴² Dramatists continually exploited this awareness, in prologues, inductions, jokes, metaphors, and plays within the play, reminding their audiences of the fictive nature of what they were watching, and of the uncertain boundary between illusion and reality. Two devices used with especial brilliance were the aside, in which an actor could step out of his role for a moment to comment on the action, and the soliloquy, in which the actor could address the audience directly, seem to take it into his confidence, or, as in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (Globe, 1607), switch, in attacking vice, from commenting on the grotesque characters of the unnamed Italian court which is the play's setting, and involve the audience directly. Holding up his moral emblem of a skull in a woman's head-dress, Vindice cries,

See, ladies, with false forms,
You deceive men, but cannot deceive worms.
(3.5.96-7)

There are no ladies on stage, and those in the audience are confronted momentarily with a frightening reality.

The early private playhouses

By 1600 the public playhouses were beginning to face competition. In the early years of her reign, Queen Elizabeth had relied heavily for dramatic entertainment during the Christmas and Shrovetide festival seasons on performances at court by the boys of the choir and grammar schools associated with St Paul's cathedral, and the choirboys of the Chapel Royal at Windsor. Richard Farrant, an enterprising master of the choirboys at Windsor, and deputy master of the boys of the parallel Chapel Royal that served the court in London, had become well known as a presenter of plays at court when, in 1576, he took a lease on rooms in the old Blackfriars monastery in the city in order to establish a playhouse for his boys, perhaps in association with the Paul's boys. After Farrant's death in 1580, the lease passed to the dramatist

⁴² Gurr, *Shakespearean Stage*, p. 180.

John Lyly, and under his guidance playing continued there until 1584. This was the first roofed, indoor playhouse in London. The space available was quite small, in all about 46 by 26 feet, and rectangular.⁴³ Probably the boys performed once or twice a week, and the audiences must have been small, so that their impact on the public arena playhouses was at first slight. Indeed, after 1576, professional adult companies increasingly displaced the boys in providing plays for court festivities.

Nevertheless, the establishment of the first Blackfriars playhouse between 1576 and 1584 marked a major innovation in offering to a select audience a sophisticated alternative to the dramatic fare provided at the adult theatres. The Paul's boys, under their new master, Thomas Giles, appointed in 1584, continued to present plays by Lyly at court, and they performed in the precincts of St Paul's cathedral until their activities were suppressed about 1590, when they gave offence by handling matters of divinity and state in connection with the Martin Marprelate controversy.⁴⁴ Much of the repertory of the boys' companies from this period is lost, but it included morality plays, classical pastorals like Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584), and the graceful court comedies of Lyly, usually based on classical themes, but laced with topical allegory, as in *Endymion* and *Midas*. These may have come to seem old-fashioned by the late 1580s, when the ascendancy of the professional adult players is indicated in the establishment of a select company of Queen's Men, under the direct patronage of the crown, in 1583. The dramatic activities of the boys up to 1590 depended, in any case, on the enthusiasm of particular masters, and it was not until 1599–1600 that another master of Paul's boys, Edward Pearce, launched a new period of quasi-professional playing in a hall within the precincts of St Paul's cathedral. The exact location of this hall has not been identified with certainty; but if Reavley Gair is right, it was very small, polygonal in shape so that it could appear as 'round' (Prologue to *Antonio's Revenge*, 1600), and seated perhaps 100 spectators at most.⁴⁵ However, the small stage had three doors, with windows above the two side doors, and an alcove with curtains above the central double doors.⁴⁶ The boys were able to draw on some of the best new talent among emerging dramatists, staging plays by Marston, Chapman, and Middleton, and their instant success may have encouraged Henry Evans to take a lease in 1600 on the Blackfriars property James Burbage had bought in 1596 (see above, p. 6), in order to establish a professional company of boys there. In

⁴³ This is Wickham's estimate, *Early English Stages*, II.2.127.

⁴⁴ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV.229–33; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 310–11.

⁴⁵ Reavley Gair, *The Children of Paul's* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 66–7.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 58–9.

this theatre, by an arrangement with Evans, Nathaniel Giles, Master of the choirboys of the Chapel Royal, began to stage plays regularly; he began with some old ones, including at least one by Lyly, but also introduced work by new dramatists, like Ben Jonson, whose *Poetaster* in 1601 poked fun at the adult players and their theatres.

The second Blackfriars playhouse was much larger than that at Paul's, and measured 66 by 46 feet; it had at least two galleries of seating for spectators, and could accommodate perhaps as many as 500. Nothing is known about the size and disposition of the stage area at Blackfriars, other than what can be gleaned from the stage directions and texts of plays put on there. Both the Paul's and Blackfriars playhouses were located within the boundaries of the city of London, but in precincts that retained ancient ecclesiastical liberties, and were not under the direct jurisdiction of civic authority. By 1608, when a new charter gave the city authority over the old liberties, the playhouses and their companies had been taken under royal protection.⁴⁷ The methods of operation of the indoor playhouses were presumably sufficiently different from those of the adult theatres, since they were able to ignore the restrictions imposed by the Privy Council in a minute of 1598 and reinforced in an order of 1600, proclaiming that 'there shall be about the City two houses [i.e., the Globe and Fortune] and no more allowed to serve for the use of common stage plays'.⁴⁸ Ben Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* (1601) was published as 'privately acted' at Blackfriars, and from about this time the indoor playhouses at Paul's and Blackfriars became generally known as 'private' theatres, in contrast to 'public' playhouses like the Globe and Fortune. The private theatres staged plays less frequently; Frederic Gerschow, a German who recorded a visit to Blackfriars on 18 September 1602, said the boys there performed once a week on Saturdays.⁴⁹ They began performances at later times, 3 or 4 in the afternoon, as against 2 o'clock, the customary time at the public theatres. They may have had different arrangements for admission, with some system of advance booking rather than payment at the door; and they may have advertised merely by word of mouth or by handbills, rather than sticking 'playbills upon every post' (*A Warning for Fair Women*, Induction, 75; Theatre/Globe, printed 1599). But whatever differences in practice there may have been, the private and public theatres were all staging plays for the entertainment of a paying audience.

The private playhouses charged much higher prices; in 1599–1600, when standing-room cost a penny at the public theatres, and a seat in the galleries twopence, the private playhouses were charging sixpence. All the audience

⁴⁷ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.480; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 123.

⁴⁸ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, IV.330. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II.46–8.

were seated at the private houses, and higher prices meant that these theatres attracted gallants, 'select and most respected auditors' (Marston, Prologue to *Antonio and Mellida*; Paul's, 1599–1600), and gentlewomen, 'the female presence; the Genteletza' (Marston, Induction to *What You Will*; Paul's, 1604). The boys acted by candlelight; in this same induction, 'Before the Music sounds for the Act', three characters enter and 'sit a good while on the Stage before the Candles are lighted'. A reference in a poem of 1629 to the 'torchy Friars'⁵⁰ may indicate how the auditorium was lit. They apparently shuttered the playhouse windows for tragedies, if Thomas Dekker's simile in a pamphlet of 1606, *Seven Deadly Sins*, can be trusted: 'All the city looked like a private playhouse, when the windows are clapped down, as if some *nocturnal*, or dismal *tragedy* were to be presented.' Playing indoors, with artificial lighting, the companies of boys also provided music between the acts of a play.

This was an innovation, for act divisions do not at this time appear to have been observed as intervals at the public theatres, and music was not played between the acts, as the Induction to Marston's *Malcontent* (Paul's; revised for the Globe, 1604) testifies. At Blackfriars music was played before the performance began, and sometimes there was dancing or singing too between the acts. Probably intervals were required because the candles needed to be trimmed; but music was a special feature of small, enclosed theatres, where soft sounds could be heard, and a range of instruments used. Blackfriars had an orchestra of 'organs [meaning pipes], lutes, pandores [ancestor of the modern banjo], violins, and flutes', as well as a double-bass, according to Gerschow.⁵¹ The tiny Paul's theatre had two 'music-houses' above and on either side of the stage, for, in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* (1600), the ghost of Andrugio is placed between them during a dance in 5.3, to look down on the final revenge of his murder, and comment on it before the curtains are drawn across the alcove in which he sits, and he is able to make his exit (5.3.115).

Not much is known about the stages and seating arrangements at the private theatres. The stages were small by comparison with those of the public playhouses. There were boxes or lords' rooms at Blackfriars, apparently at the sides of the stage. The evidence of stage directions shows that there were three doors for use by actors in entering and leaving the stage⁵² at both the private houses. One innovation apparently introduced at public theatres in the late 1590s became a feature of the private houses, especially Blackfriars; this was the practice of allowing members of the audience, who paid extra

⁵⁰ Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 237.

⁵¹ Cited in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.47.

⁵² Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III.132.

for the privilege, to have a stool and sit on the stage. If the stage at Blackfriars was at one end of the hall, and extended most of the width of the room, there may have been space both for boxes and also for gallants who wished to display themselves to sit on the sides of the stage, without interfering with the sight-lines of other members of the audience, or with the action of the play itself.⁵³ In his play *The Devil is an Ass* (Blackfriars, 1616), Ben Jonson offers a vivid glimpse of one kind of foolish gallant, a squire of Norfolk, Fitzdottrell, showing off to his friends, to his wife, and to the women in the audience:

Today I go to the Blackfriars Playhouse
 Sit i'the view, salute all my acquaintance,
 Rise up between the acts, let fall my cloak,
 Publish a handsome man, and a rich suit
 (As that's a special end, why we go thither,
 All that pretend, to stand for't o'the stage)
 The ladies ask who's that? (For they do come
 To see us, love, as we do to see them).
 (1.6.31–8)

The private theatres, then, offered several kinds of refinement not available at the public playhouses: a more select clientele; greater comfort, including cushions on the benches (at the public playhouses the audience at this time sat on benches 'not adorned with mats', according to William Davenant's Prologue to *The Unfortunate Lovers*; Blackfriars, 1638); protection from the weather; and music and songs between the acts.

The boys' companies specialized for some years after 1600 in satiric comedies, and their characteristic style of playing has been described as 'antimimetic' in contrast to what has been seen as the naive illusionism of the adult theatres.⁵⁴ This seems too categorical an opposition, since the adult companies always seem to have practised a mode of self-conscious theatre, playing against the audience's awareness of the stage as only a stage (see Chapter 2 for fuller discussion of this matter). At the same time, it would appear that the boys, playing and mimicking adults, invited their audiences to be more continuously critical and detached, and were more stridently antimimetic in their frequent mockery of what they portrayed as old-fashioned

⁵³ Herbert Berry, 'The stage and boxes at Blackfriars', *SP* 63 (1966), reprinted in *Shakespeare's Playhouses* (New York, 1987); Berry speculates about the location of the boxes, and guesses that they might have been at the rear of the stage. See also the mock advice in Dekker's *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), cited in Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, iv.365–9.

⁵⁴ Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 153.

public-theatre modes of drama or styles of verse. They deliberately catered to a more select and homogeneous audience, seeking to create the consciousness of an in-group that would appreciate their railing, an audience drawn largely from gallants, gentlemen and gentlewomen, and the sons of gentlemen who thronged the nearby Inns of Court, treating these as finishing schools rather than as institutions for serious study of the law.

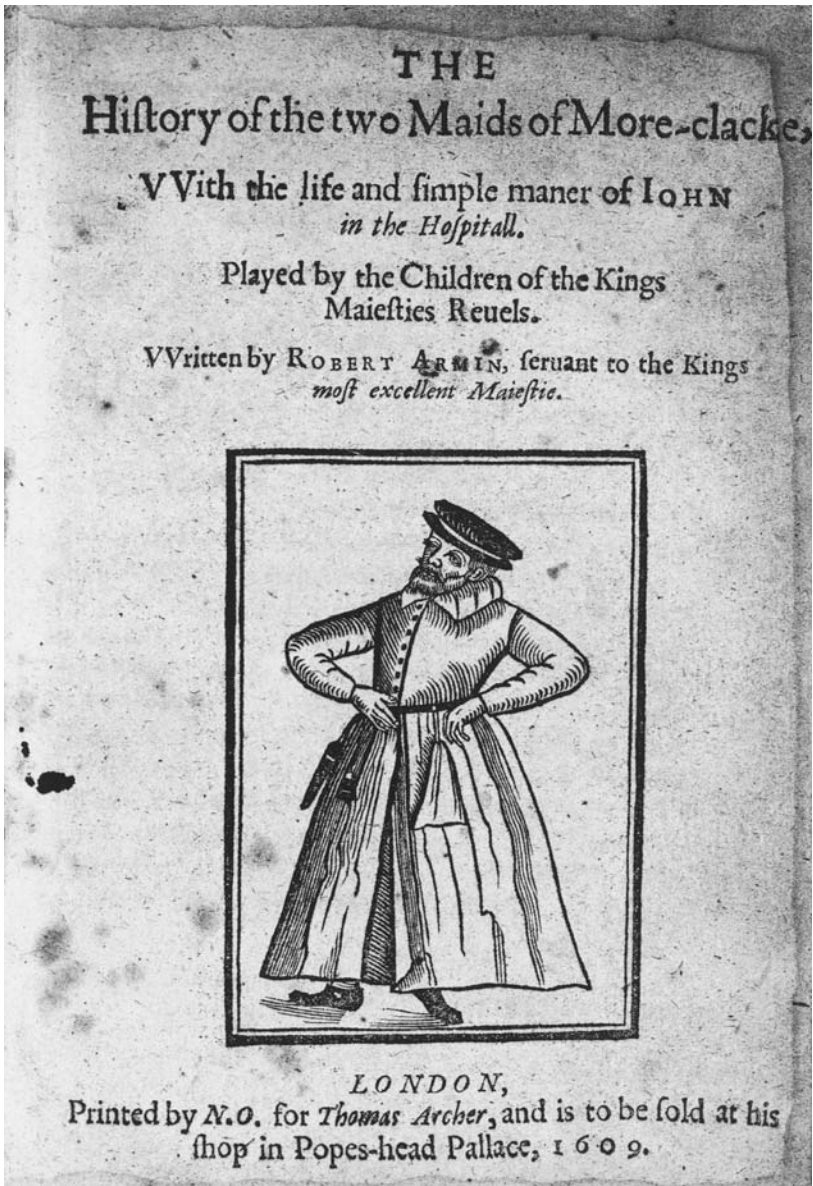
Initially the private theatres succeeded in drawing a 'good, gentle Audience' (*Jack Drum's Entertainment*, 1600, sig. H3v) to Paul's, and offering at Blackfriars 'a nest of boys able to ravish a man', according to Thomas Middleton's advice to a gallant in *Father Hubbard's Tales*, 1604.⁵⁵ So too in the bad Quarto of *Hamlet*, 1603, Gilderstone says in 2.2 'the principal public audience... are turned to private plays'. However, the boys had a more limited range than the adult players, and the satirical comedies which they preferred were always liable to give offence either to civic authorities or to the court. Furthermore, boy actors grew out of their parts as they became adults, so it is not surprising that the companies tended to have brief and chequered careers. For a variety of reasons the fortunes of the Paul's boys declined by 1606,⁵⁶ and they ceased playing altogether. By 1603 Middleton had replaced Marston as their principal dramatist, and the ageing of the boys may be reflected in the tone of some later plays he wrote for them, targeting the corruptions of unscrupulous usurers or lawyers in London rather than the corruptions of a court. Like the adult companies, the boys at Blackfriars were given a measure of royal protection in 1603 with the title of Children of the Queen's Revels, but lost their privilege because of offence caused by what James took to be insults against the Scots in *Eastward Ho* (1605); two of the authors (Chapman and Jonson) were imprisoned, and the third (Marston) fled. Then in 1607–8, more serious offence was given by topical comments on the French in Chapman's play *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron*, and in some lost play which included criticism of James himself. The company survived, and the King seems quickly to have forgotten his vow that 'they should never play more';⁵⁷ indeed, they staged three plays at court for the Christmas festivities in 1608. Then in 1609, the King's Men, who had obtained a surrender of the lease Richard Burbage had inherited from his father on the Blackfriars theatre, took possession of it, and began to use it as a winter house, continuing to play at the Globe during the summer months.

The Blackfriars company of boys seems to have been absorbed into the group playing at Whitefriars, another hall theatre converted before 1609

⁵⁵ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.50.

⁵⁶ Gair, *Paul's*, pp. 172–3; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 307.

⁵⁷ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.54; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 514–15.



7 Robert Armin, title-page of *The Two Maids of Moreclack*, performed by the Children of the King's Revels, 1606–7

from some portion of the old monastic buildings situated between Fleet Street and the Thames. Here they continued to work as the Children of the Queen's Revels until 1613, when they amalgamated with an adult company, the Lady Elizabeth's Men, playing at the Swan, with the intention of using Whitefriars as a winter playhouse, and the Swan as a summer house, in emulation of the King's Men at Blackfriars and the Globe. However, the lease at Whitefriars ran out in 1614, and, with the building of the new Hope on Bankside, activity at the Swan was curtailed; little further is known about the Whitefriars theatre. The boys' companies at the private theatres thus flourished for a relatively short period. It may be that they ran out of steam, exhausting for their audiences the variations that could be worked in the kinds of play they did best; but a more important factor may have been the ageing of the companies. Still, their impact during the period from 1599 to 1614 was enormous. They established the desirability of enclosed theatres for winter playing, and the idea of a winter season (at Whitefriars performances were given only from Michaelmas to Easter). They showed that small theatres, charging higher prices, could operate profitably for a select audience; and after 1614 no more public arena theatres were built, apart from the replacement of the Fortune after it burned down in 1621.

The development of the indoor playhouses at Paul's, Blackfriars, and Whitefriars points to an increasing concern not only for refinement, comfort, and sophistication, but also for a kind of naturalism. In these theatres the relation of the audience to the stage was fundamentally changed. At the public theatres the groundlings stood nearest to the stage, and spectators paid more to sit further away in the galleries; at the private playhouses, as in modern theatres, the expensive seats were those closest to the stage. At the public theatres, actors would literally play to the galleries, if they played to the most esteemed part of their audience, and in open-air theatres on stages that would require bold and strong delivery of lines. At the private theatres, where for the players the most important part of the audience was seated nearest the stage, a more low-keyed and intimate style was possible. The idea of what is 'natural', of course, changes all the time. By the 1590s the playhouses of the previous two decades were noted for what had now come to seem bombast and strutting; so Robert Greene makes a player in his *Greene's Groatsworth of Wit* (1592) boast, 'The twelve labours of Hercules have I terribly thundered on the stage.' At the beginning of the seventeenth century the style of plays popular in the late 1580s and 1590s had come to seem unnatural or old-fashioned to the new dramatists like Jonson and Marston; so, for instance, *The Spanish Tragedy* (Rose/Fortune, 1587) is mocked or parodied in several plays, such as Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (Paul's, 1599), and Ben Jonson imagines a foolish playgoer in

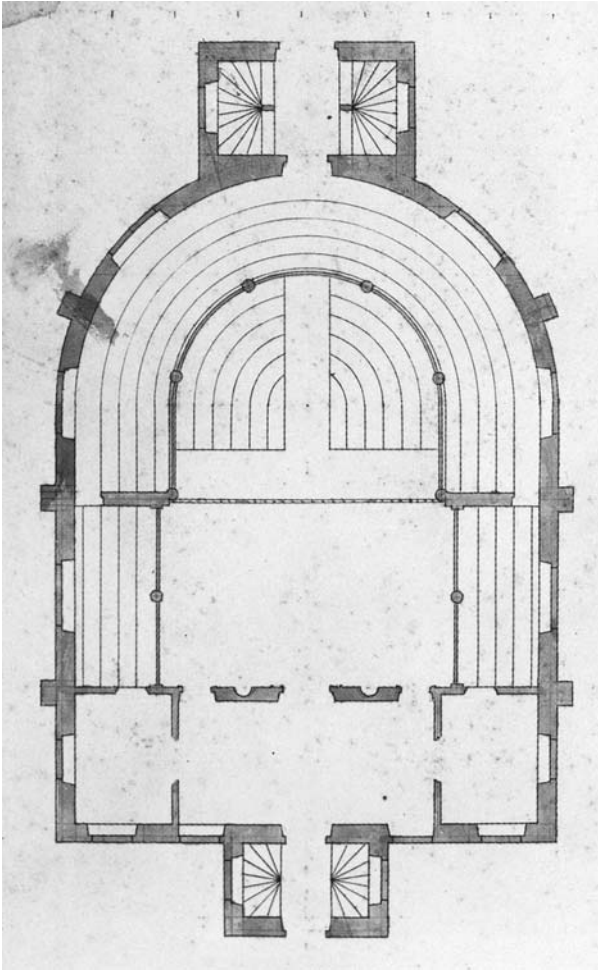
the induction to *Cynthia's Revels* (Blackfriars, 1601) swearing 'that the old Hieronimo, as it was first acted, was the only best, and judiciously penned play of Europe' (191–2). Then again, by 1607 or so Beaumont, writing for the now well-established private theatres, could, in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, mock not only old plays like *The Spanish Tragedy*, and Heywood's *Four Prentices of London* (Red Bull, published 1615, but an old play then), but also contemporary works that appealed to 'citizens', like Heywood's *If You Know not Me, You Know Nobody* (Curtain/Red Bull, 1605), and *The Travels of the Three English Brothers* by John Day, William Rowley, and George Wilkins (Curtain/Red Bull, 1607). If the choicest blank verse of one decade seemed mere bombast to the next, the private theatres brought a qualitative shift because of the change in the audience's relationship to the stage, and the greater intimacy of the space. This is seen most markedly in the new comedies, written in prose rather than blank verse, set in London, and concerned with such matters as the tricking of a miserly rich uncle by a poor but witty gentleman named Witgood (Middleton, *A Trick to Catch the Old One*; Paul's/Blackfriars, 1605); or with the outwitting of another difficult uncle by Truewit (Jonson, *Epicene*; Whitefriars, 1609). In another play in which a usurer is punished (Chapman, Jonson, and Marston, *Eastward Ho*, Blackfriars, 1605), an amusing in-joke is the reduction of Hamlet, the public-theatre prince, to a rather different role: the cast includes 'Hamlet, a footman'.

The later theatres

The three new theatres erected for public performances between 1615 and 1642 were all small, indoor playhouses. The first, the so-called Porter's Hall (1615–16), was probably never finished, because the inhabitants of the Blackfriars area where it was located successfully petitioned to have it suppressed. Playing ceased there by 1617, but the title-pages of two plays, Nathan Field's *Amends for Ladies* and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* (both 1618), state that these were performed there.⁵⁸ The second theatre, the Cockpit in Drury Lane, or Phoenix, as it came to be known, was situated to the west of the city limits, in an increasingly affluent suburb, convenient both for Westminster and the Inns of Court. This theatre was converted from a cockpit in 1616–17; the circular building may have been extended into a U-shaped auditorium, with two galleries for spectators, which probably measured 55 feet by 40 feet.⁵⁹ The new playhouse at once became the 'favourite resort of the gentry' after

⁵⁸ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi.85.

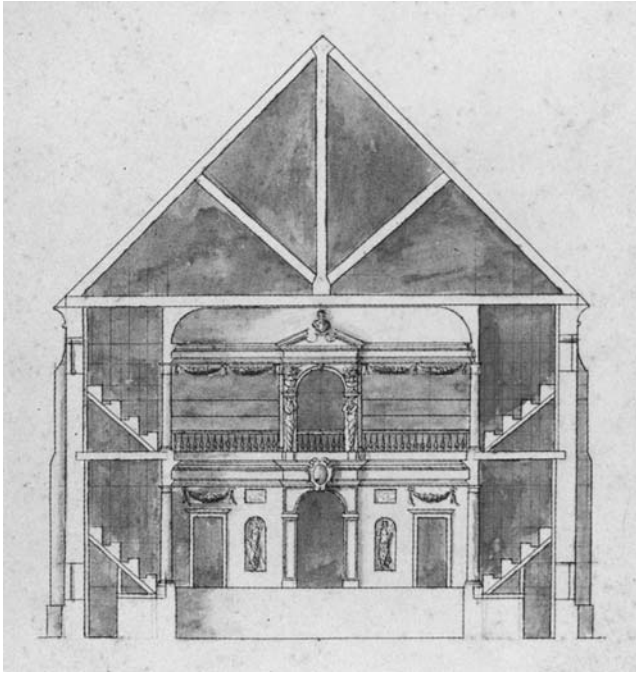
⁵⁹ Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 64–7.



8 Drawing by Inigo Jones of about 1616, thought to be of the plan and stage façade of the Cockpit or Phoenix theatre, Drury Lane: (a) the plan

Blackfriars.⁶⁰ The third playhouse, converted from a barn, was the Salisbury Court, built in 1629–30 in the Whitefriars area, between Fleet Street and the River Thames. This also was 40 feet wide, but nothing more is known about its dimensions. However, it was sometimes referred to in plays staged there as a ‘little House’ (Thomas Nabbes, Epilogue to *Tottenham Court* (1633)), and it was probably smaller and less well fitted up than the Blackfriars and Phoenix. It never seems to have enjoyed the same success and prestige as the

⁶⁰ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi.47.



8 (b) the stage façade

other two. A fourth new theatre of some importance was built on the site of a cockpit at court in Whitehall in 1630; the building was 58 feet square, and the design, with two galleries of seating, and a painted stage façade, retained many features common to other playhouses. This theatre, however, planned by Inigo Jones for court performances, had an elaborate semi-circular stage façade with five doors in it.⁶¹

A new kind of private theatre thus achieved ascendancy after 1617, operated by adult companies; the Cockpit/Phoenix and Salisbury Court joined the Blackfriars, used as a winter playhouse by the King's Men since 1609, as theatres with an increasing appeal to the gentry. The early theatres were located either on Bankside, south of the Thames, or to the north and east of the city limits; the later theatres were all within the city in areas protected by the crown, or in the western and north-west suburbs, in areas of growing population and wealth. The population of London doubled between 1600 and 1650, rising from about 200,000 inhabitants to 400,000, a growth brought about by a massive influx of people from the provinces. This growth increasingly fostered a polarization of society that seems more and more marked

⁶¹ Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 68–71; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 623–6.

through the reigns of James I and Charles I. Dramatists writing for the later private theatres were inclined to congratulate their audiences for their sophistication, and distance themselves from the fare provided at the arena playhouses.

For many years in an age that lacked newspapers, films, television, and all the numerous forms of commercial entertainment now available, the public playhouses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were truly popular in that all ranks of society might be found there:

For as we see at all the playhouse doors,
When ended is the play, the dance, and song,
A thousand townsmen, gentlemen, and whores
Porters and serving-men together throng.
(Sir John Davies, Epigram 17, 'In Cosmum', ?1593)⁶²

Going to the theatre, moreover, did not demand literacy in an age when most of the population was illiterate. In later years there developed what became a well-established pecking order, as far as theatres were concerned, in the minds of those who wrote for and attended the private playhouses, especially the Blackfriars and Phoenix. Writers were ready to sneer at the competition of the Red Bull, and Thomas Carew, writing prefatory verses for Davenant's *The Just Italian* in 1630, was not alone in his contempt for

that adulterate stage, where not a tongue
Of th'untuned kennel, can a line repeat
Of serious sense,

or in his praise of the 'natural, unstrained action' offered by 'the true brood of actors' at Blackfriars.⁶³ But if it was easy to take a lofty attitude towards the Red Bull or the Fortune, with their jigs, target-fights, clowning, and the 'shag-haired devils' (in the ever-popular *Doctor Faustus*) that ran 'roaring over the stage with squibs in their mouths, while drummers make thunder in the tiring-house, and the twelve-penny hirelings make artificial lightning in their heavens' (John Melton, *Astrologaster*, 1620, p. 31), this sensationalism of staging was paralleled by a new fashion on the private stages: for their refinement and sophistication included a taste for a sensationalism of content in plays that deal with sexual perversity or deviance, and toy with rape, incest, and adultery, like Beaumont and Fletcher's *A King and No King* (King's Men, Blackfriars, 1611), or Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (Phoenix, 1632).

⁶² Gurr, *Playgoing*, pp. 65–6. ⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

The professional companies had guarded their repertoires, since it was customary for the company to buy a play outright from the author(s), and it was in the interest of each company not to allow too many of those which remained in the repertory to come into print. However, the private theatres sought to create a kind of collusion with their audience, as the increasing use of inductions, prologues, and epilogues suggests. During the reign of Charles 'a flourishing literary world was gradually being established'⁶⁴ around the leading private playhouses. Many plays were copied and circulated in manuscript, and many more were published within a year or two of first performance, often with prologues, epilogues, and commendatory verses, all creating a link between the play and its audience. It would appear that audiences at the private theatres were now in the main literate, and plays were being written to be read, not just performed. It may well be true that 'Plays by Brome, Shirley and Davenant offered the audience images of themselves in parks, squares, taverns and gaming houses, supplying standards against which forms and codes of behaviour could be established, scrutinized and adjusted.'⁶⁵ The decor and design of the private theatres also reflected a change in taste; for while the early large playhouses were round or square, and were related to bear-baiting rings and inn-yards, the later private playhouses were small and rectangular, and incorporated ideas borrowed from Renaissance Italian architectural treatises, like those of Andrea Palladio and Sebastiano Serlio, studied by Inigo Jones, whose designs survive for what may be the Cockpit/Phoenix in 1616–17. The stage façade had an elegant elevation in the manner of Palladio, with a round-arched central opening, flanked by two square-headed niches with sculpted figures in them, and two square-headed doors surmounted by ornamental scrolls (see pp. 32–3). The railed gallery above also had a central, pedimented arch, opening into a space apparently reserved for actors or musicians, since seating continued through the galleries on either side.⁶⁶ The later theatres also had low rails around the outside of the stage; these are first mentioned in 1604.

It would be wrong to conclude that there was a clear-cut distinction between the audiences and the repertoires at the indoor playhouses and those at the public theatres. Not only did the King's Men continue to play at the Blackfriars and the Globe, but there was considerable interchange of repertory between the Cockpit and the Red Bull. At the private theatres gentlemen and gentlewomen paid their shilling to sit in the pit, but the audience included 'the faeces or grounds of your people, that sit in the oblique caves and wedges

⁶⁴ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 105.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 110–11. ⁶⁶ Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 66.

of your house, your sinful sixpenny mechanics' (Ben Jonson, Induction to *The Magnetic Lady*; Blackfriars, 1632). There is evidence of gentry attending the Globe, while on one notable occasion Count Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador, visited the rebuilt Fortune in 1621, and the players feasted him in the adjoining garden.⁶⁷ Although the King's Men had the lion's share of court performances, other companies were also invited to play there from time to time. The northern theatres, the Red Bull and Fortune, catered primarily to audiences who preferred old-fashioned kinds of drama, and the Red Bull especially offered a repertory largely drawn from the popular tradition of chivalry, romance, farce, history, and fantasy.⁶⁸

The 'Praeludium' to Thomas Goffe's *The Careless Shepherdess* (Salisbury Court, 1638) consists of a debate between 'Spark', an Inns of Court man; 'Spruce', a courtier; 'Thrift', a citizen; and 'Landlord', a country gentleman. For Spark and Spruce, the 'Prerogative of the wits in Town' is to 'censure Poetry' according to the 'Laws of Comedy and Tragedy' (sig. B2r-B2v); but Landlord wants to see again the Fool in *The Changeling* (1622), an old play he once saw at this playhouse, while Thrift decides to recover the shilling he has paid:

I'll go to the Bull, or Fortune, and there see
A Play for two pence, with a Jig to boot.
(sig. B4v)

Thrift's remark implies that the other theatres had abandoned the practice, continued at the Red Bull and Fortune, of following the performance of a play with an afterpiece in the form of a jig, or brief farcical entertainment with songs or dances (but see below, pp. 44-5). To Spark and Spruce, both Thrift and Landlord appear fools; Spark dismisses them:

'Tis hard to tell which is the verier fool,
The Country Gentleman, or Citizen:
Your judgments are ridiculous and vain
As your Forefathers, whose dull intellect
Did nothing understand but fools and fighting.
(sig. B3r)

At the same time a different kind of drama was being played at the Phoenix and Salisbury Court, where 'the more popular end of the fashionable spectrum participated in the Elizabethan tradition too'.⁶⁹ In these theatres old

⁶⁷ Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 545.

⁶⁸ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 181-3. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 183-4.

patriotic plays on the reigns of Henry VIII or Queen Elizabeth were revived, and new political comedies were presented, most notably those of Richard Brome, perhaps the most important dramatist of the period. All these plays reflected growing dissatisfaction with the rule of Charles I, and show that audiences for them were interested in a 'drama that was sceptical, critical and levelling'.⁷⁰ It is arguable that much of the most significant drama of the period was being staged at these theatres, and it will not do to take the snobbish sentiments of a Spark or Spruce too literally.

Others who paid their shilling at the private theatres in the 1630s also looked for plays to please gentlewomen, plays that could be judged as 'matter for serious discussion'.⁷¹ This was especially true of the Blackfriars playhouse, which drew on the talents of new dramatists like Sir William Davenant, whose links were with a court circle patronized by Queen Henrietta Maria; she attended special privately arranged performances at Blackfriars on at least three occasions between 1634 and 1638. Although old plays were revived by the King's Men, amongst them Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (1607), Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613), and *Sir John Oldcastle*, a play written for the Admiral's Men in 1599 by Michael Drayton and others, the main repertory consisted of the plays of Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, and Ben Jonson, together with new work by Davenant, Massinger, Shirley, and others. The patrons who paid to sit in the pit no doubt were like these new dramatists in priding themselves on their wit and disdaining the 'Good easy judging souls' who used to 'expect a jig, or target fight' (Davenant, Prologue to *The Unfortunate Lovers*, printed 1643).

The new drama of the Blackfriars during the Caroline period shows a conscious rejection of the highly charged and often highly metaphorical dramatic verse exemplified in Marlowe's 'mighty line', in the energy of the old history plays, or in the fierce compression of plays like *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607), in favour of a verse so limpid and quiet that it seems a much more naturalistic vehicle for the conversation of educated characters who are no longer quite different from the audience in being distanced by romance or history, made heroic, or heroically corrupt, and being further differentiated by a stylized speech in strongly marked verse; but rather speak a language much closer to that of the better patrons who prized ease and wit. The preference of the Blackfriars audience for sophistication and wit rather than vigorous action and clowning may mean that the old plays that survived in the repertories of the private theatres were adapted to some extent to a new style of playing. Certainly the Red Bull was noted for its noisy and vulgar

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 185. ⁷¹ Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 179.

audience,⁷² and for plays full of fights and bombast, at a time when the private playhouses were accelerating a shift towards refinement, and appealing to more consciously critical audiences, including the ‘noble Gentlewomen’ who sat as ‘high Commissioners of wit’ (Shirley, Prologue to *The Coronation*; Phoenix, 1635).

Players and playing

In 1583, the Queen’s Secretary, Sir Francis Walsingham, directed the Master of the Revels, Edmond Tylney, to select players from the dozen or more companies then operating mainly in the provinces: Edmond Howes, in his continuation of John Stow’s *Annals* (1615), recorded what happened:⁷³

Comedians and stage-players of former times were very poor and ignorant in respect of these of this time: but being now grown very skilful and exquisite actors for all matters, they were entertained into the service of divers great lords: out of which companies there were twelve of the best chosen, and, at the request of Sir Francis Walsingham, they were sworn the queen’s servants and were allowed wages and liveries as grooms of the chamber: and until the year 1583, the queen had no players.

Howes went on to note that there were two ‘rare men’ among the actors, Robert Wilson and Richard Tarlton, both noted for their ‘extemporal wit’. The establishment of this company under royal protection in London marked the beginning of a new and enhanced social stature for leading actors. It is an exaggeration to claim, as Gurr does, that Tarlton, ‘the wonder of his time’ as Howes called him, ‘became the chief emblem of the emerging national consciousness at the end of the sixteenth century’,⁷⁴ but he certainly acquired a legendary reputation by the time of his death in 1588. He was loved for his clowning, his impromptu songs and rhymes, and his repartee, though the collection of *Tarlton’s Jestes* published after his death (the earliest edition is of 1611) merely uses his name to sell what is largely a gathering of old chestnuts. He was equally popular at court and in the provinces, where he could make an audience laugh simply by sticking his head out ‘the tire-house door and tapestry between’ (Henry Peacham, *Thalia’s Banquet*, 1620, Epigram 94). Less is known about Robert Wilson, but, like Tarlton, he became conspicuous as an actor in the 1570s, and ended his career with the Queen’s Men.

⁷² Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi.238–47.

⁷³ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.104–5; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 208.

⁷⁴ Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 121.



9 John Scottowe, drawing of the actor Richard Tarlton (?1588); see p. 38

Tylney picked out twelve men to form the Queen's company, and perhaps already a norm was established of twelve sharers in the company: ten or twelve seems to have remained the usual number.⁷⁵ The sharers in the early companies were the principal players, and their shares constituted their investment in their joint stock of playing apparel, properties, and playbooks. The companies did not own theatre buildings, but normally made an arrangement with the owner of a theatre to perform there in return for a proportion of the takings, half the money collected in the galleries at their

⁷⁵ G. E. Bentley, *Profession of Player* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), p. 42.

daily performances.⁷⁶ Before the erection of the first custom-built theatres in London in 1576, the companies had been used to a peripatetic life, and indeed, the Queen's Men spent much of their time in the 1580s on the road, visiting Norwich, Bristol, Leicester, Cambridge, Bath, Dover, and other towns.⁷⁷ The companies had no habit at this time of settling in one place and investing in a theatre building.

Even when the first professional theatres were established in London, life for most of the companies could at any moment become precarious. They might be forced to seek another theatre if relations with the current owner became strained. Other circumstances beyond their control might force a company to regroup, break up, move to the provinces, or go abroad to travel in northern Europe, where English players were in demand. After the death of Tarlton, the Queen's Men seem to have lost ground to the competition from the Lord Admiral's and Lord Strange's Men, who between 1588 and 1594 were using the Theatre and the Rose, and who had a new star actor in Edward Alleyn. The Queen's Men did not survive the great plague of 1593 as a London company; after they 'broke and went into the country to play'⁷⁸ in May 1593, they never returned as a group to the metropolis. The plague was a special hazard, since its recurrence was unpredictable and playing was automatically suspended when the deaths per week rose above a certain number (variable in the reign of Elizabeth, but fixed at thirty in the reign of James). A company would then seek to maintain an income by touring in the provinces, though this might not work out; so Henslowe, writing to Alleyn, then on tour, from London in September 1593, reported that Lord Pembroke's Men had returned to London because they could not make enough to cover their costs, and were forced to pawn their wardrobe.⁷⁹ A major outbreak of plague, such as occurred in 1593, 1603, 1610, 1625, 1630, and 1636–7, could cause the theatres to be closed for months on end – thirteen in 1603–4, eight in 1625, seven months in 1630, and well over a year between May 1636 and October 1637. The effect on a company could be shattering, as in the case of Pembroke's Men, who, like the Queen's Men, disappear in the 1590s.⁸⁰

A third factor that could interrupt the activities of a company was a restraint on playing brought about by a play that for some reason gave offence, such as occurred with the production of Nashe's lost play *The Isle of Dogs* at the Swan Theatre in 1597 (see above, p. 6); the company concerned, a newly formed Pembroke's Men, left the Swan and regrouped with the Admiral's

⁷⁶ Henslowe's *Diary*, p. xxviii; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 1.44.

⁷⁷ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.105–7. ⁷⁸ Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 7.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280. ⁸⁰ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.130–1.

Men at the Rose when the owner's licence to stage plays at the Swan was revoked. Yet another hazard that could affect the fortunes of a company was fire. The Globe burned down in 1613, when the discharge of guns during a production of *Henry VIII* set fire to the thatched roof. It seems that on this occasion the players were able to save their playbooks and other belongings. The fire at the Fortune in 1621 was more disastrous for the Palsgrave's Men, who lost all their apparel and playbooks.⁸¹ The company never fully recovered, and was ruined when plague halted playing for months in 1625.

The death of a leading actor like Richard Tarlton, or departure of a celebrity like Edward Alleyn, who retired from playing in 1597, could also be a major blow to a company. But if the record of most of the companies is one of instability, playing was also both glamorous and profitable, and puritan and other critics of the stage never ceased to complain that the theatres were crowded while the churches remained empty. During the later years of Queen Elizabeth's reign the companies relied on aristocratic patronage for support, and it was a considerable enhancement of their status when James I took the leading groups under royal patronage after 1603. Two companies, the Lord Admiral's and the Lord Chamberlain's Men, were exceptional in enjoying relative stability and success over a long period. The Admiral's Men became Prince Henry's Men on the accession of James I, and the Palsgrave's or King of Bohemia's company on the death of Prince Henry in 1612. The leading actor of the Admiral's Men, Edward Alleyn, married the stepdaughter of the owner of the Rose, Philip Henslowe; Alleyn himself owned the Fortune,⁸² and after he retired from playing (he returned to the stage in 1600, it is said at the request of the Queen), he retained an interest in the company of his friends and former colleagues almost until his death in 1626. It took the burning of their theatre, the loss of their stock, and a bad plague year to cause the company eventually to fail in 1625.

The ties of family and friendship between theatre owner and company were also vitally important in the even longer and more successful career of the Chamberlain's Men, who became the King's Men under James I. James Burbage, who built the Theatre, was the father of Richard, the leading actor of the company. James probably overreached himself financially in 1596, when he bought part of the Blackfriars complex of buildings intending to convert rooms there to a theatre, only to have the Privy Council prevent him from doing so on the petition of local inhabitants (see above, p. 6). James died in 1597, and his two sons, Cuthbert, who took over as administrator, and

⁸¹ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 1.141; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, p. 546.

⁸² *Henslowe's Diary*, p. 302.

Richard, did not have the capital to build the Globe in 1599. They therefore set up a unique arrangement, by which they held one half of the property, with five senior actors in the company each holding an equal share in the other half. In this way sharers in the company became also sharers in the theatre they used. As years passed the personnel of the company changed; Richard Burbage died in 1619, and shares changed hands, but the effect was to consolidate the ownership of the Globe and Blackfriars among the sharers of the King's Men, who controlled the leading company and the principal public and private theatres through the later years of James I and the reign of Charles I.

The most famous Elizabethan actors were of two kinds. One kind were clowns, like Tarlton, Wilson, and Will Kemp. Tarlton and Wilson were noted for their ability to improvise; and Tarlton and Kemp were expert at jigs, the farcical afterpieces with songs and dances popular in the public theatres. A drawing of Tarlton shows him playing on a tabor and pipe (see p. 39), and Kemp is represented dancing on the title-page of *Kemp's Nine Days Wonder* (1600), celebrating the occasion when he danced from London to Norwich.⁸³ The other kind were heroic actors like Alleyn, famous for creating majestic leading roles, among them the original Tamburlaine, Barabas, and Faustus; and Richard Burbage, who made his reputation in roles like Richard III. Alleyn had ceased to act by 1604 or 1605, but Burbage went on to develop a wide range of roles, including, for instance, Hamlet, Malevole in Marston's *Malcontent*, Othello, and Ferdinand in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. After small indoor playhouses became established with the revival of the children's theatres about 1600, some boy actors began to achieve fame with a different range of characterizations, reflecting changing taste and increasing sophistication.

Their rise to fame is significant because virtually nothing is known of the boys who played all the female roles in plays before 1600. In 1561 Queen Elizabeth had given the Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal power to 'take' children from anywhere in the realm in order to maintain the choir,⁸⁴ and the Master in 1600, Nathaniel Giles, abused his prerogative by impressing boys from various grammar schools in London to play in his company as actors. One boy, impressed from St Paul's Grammar School at about the age of thirteen, was Nathan Field, whose education was continued under Ben Jonson, and who became a playwright and an actor of distinction. Alleyn and Burbage probably picked up an education, so far as they had one, on the stage, but Field had been trained in the classics, and was highly literate; he was a leading actor with the Children of the Chapel, which became the

⁸³ Foakes, *Illustrations*, pp. 44–5, 150.

⁸⁴ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.33.



10 Drawing (1608) of the actor John Green as Nobody in the play *Nobody and Somebody*

Queen's Revels company, and then joined the Lady Elizabeth's Men in 1613, finally becoming a sharer in the King's Men about 1616. By this time he was as famous as Burbage, and a collaborator in playwriting with Fletcher, in whose plays he was a noted performer.⁸⁵ The evidence suggests he practised a more refined acting style appropriate to the indoor theatres; so in commendatory verses, Field praised Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608) as possessing

Such art, it should me better satisfy,
Than if the monster clapped his thousand hands
And drowned the scene with his confused cry.

⁸⁵ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi.146.

The two plays Field wrote on his own, *A Woman is a Weathercock* (Queen's Revels, 1609; printed 1612) and *Amends for Ladies* (1611; printed 1618), are comedies the titles of which emphasize the new importance given to women in Jacobean and Caroline drama; the later play turns on the question of which is the best condition for a woman – to be a maid, a wife, or a widow. Other actors who began as boys playing female roles matured into adult players, like Richard Sharpe, who was the first to play the Duchess of Malfi (1613), or Stephen Hammerton, who 'was at first a most noted and beautiful Woman Actor, but afterwards he acted with equal Grace and Applause, a Young Lover's Part', according to James Wright in *Historia Histrionica*, 1699.⁸⁶ He created the part of Oriana in the 1632 revival of Fletcher's *The Wild Goose Chase* (1621). Other distinguished adult actors were noted not for a particular strength so much as for ability to play a variety of roles; an example is Richard Perkins (Queen Henrietta's Men), whose name appears in a number of cast lists, and who was praised by Webster in a note appended to *The White Devil* (1612) as an actor whose 'action did crown both the beginning and the end' – here probably in the part of Flamineo.

This same company at the Cockpit/Phoenix had a noted comic actor in William Robbins, who played the changeling, Antonio, in Middleton and Rowley's play of this name (1622). His playing of this role, and that of 'Rawbone, a thin citizen' in Shirley's *The Wedding* (1626), suggests that he was a very different kind of actor from Tarlton or Kemp, a comedian rather than a clown, one whose talents did not lie in singing, dancing, or improvisation, that is, in fooling about and being himself, so much as in performing a variety of character parts. There may be an analogy here with Robert Armin, the leading comedian of the Chamberlain's/King's Men between the departure of Kemp in 1600 and 1610 or so. However, Armin seems to have been skilled as a clown in Tarlton's vein as well as being a comic character actor, and he was succeeded by John Shank, who was more of a clown in the old style. Perhaps the taste for revivals of old plays, and also of new ones on Elizabethan themes in the 1620s and 1630s,⁸⁷ was accompanied by a revival of enthusiasm for clowning and jigs. After a complaint about disturbances at the Fortune, an order was issued for suppressing jigs in 1612,⁸⁸ but, like so many other orders, it was probably not enforced for long. The fame of Shank, 'John Shank for a jig', was marked in 1632 in

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.693. ⁸⁷ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 185, 198–203.

⁸⁸ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, vi.146; Wickham, *English Professional Theatre*, pp. 543–4.

William Heminges's *Elegy on Randolph's Finger*, line 106,⁸⁹ a mock elegy on the loss of his little finger in a fight by the dramatist Thomas Randolph; and since the author was the son of John Heminges of the King's Men, and sold his share in the company to Shank, he knew what he was saying. Other notable comedians of this period were Andrew Cane of Prince Charles's Men, and Timothy Read of the King's Revels and Queen Henrietta's Men, who was gifted as a dancer.⁹⁰ It is of some interest that the citizen Thrift in the Praeludium to Goffe's *The Careless Shepherdess* (see above, p. 36), remarks

I never saw Read peeping through the curtain
But ravishing joy enter'd into my heart.

It seems that Read was still working a trick for which Tarlton had been noted, not only by Henry Peacham (see above, p. 38), but by Thomas Nashe, who recorded in *Piers Penneless* in 1592 how 'the people began exceedingly to laugh, when Tarlton first peeped out his head'.⁹¹

The business affairs of a company were complex. At first the Admiral's Men relied on Henslowe for help, and the Chamberlain's Men had James Burbage, and after him Cuthbert, to manage matters for them. Later on, actors began to take on administrative roles, as Edward Alleyn did for the Admiral's/Prince Henry's Men at the Fortune, while John Heminges, an actor until 1611 or so, and leading sharer, became full-time manager for the King's Men until his death in 1630. He negotiated performances at court, and dealt with the Master of the Revels in the matter of licensing plays for the stage. Thomas Greene (died 1612) was succeeded as manager of Queen Anne's company at the Red Bull by Christopher Beeston, actor turned manager and entrepreneur; Beeston built the Cockpit in 1616–17, and had a long career successfully manipulating companies to his own advantage at the two theatres in which he had an interest. Another important managerial figure was Richard Gunnell, an actor with Prince Henry's Men, who became a sharer in the new Fortune in 1621, and later at the Salisbury Court theatre, of which he was part-owner.

Little is known about the day-to-day affairs of the companies, but someone had to authorize and organize

the purchase of new costumes and costume materials; paying for new plays by freelance dramatists; getting scripts approved by the Master of the Revels, paying him for licenses for the theatre and for occasional privileges, like playing

⁸⁹ Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, II.563.

⁹⁰ Foakes, *Illustrations*, p. 158. ⁹¹ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.344.

during parts of Lent; paying the company's regular contributions to the poor of the parish, assessing fines against sharers or hired men for infringement of company regulations; calling rehearsals; collecting fees for court and private performances; supervising the preparation and distribution of playbills; and perhaps for paying the hired men.⁹²

It seems to have been customary for sharers to gather to hear a new play read, and decide perhaps on casting; Henslowe laid out 5s. 'for good cheer' at the Sun Inn in New Fish Street when the company met to listen to a new script in 1598.⁹³ Boy actors were recruited by being apprenticed to sharers, and some, perhaps many, of these boys stayed on after their voices broke to become adult actors or hired men, and were paid a weekly wage to work for a company. The size of the companies has been much debated. Very few cast lists remain, about fifteen printed in the hundreds of published plays, and four in manuscript plays, all dating from 1619 or later;⁹⁴ most of these are incomplete. In addition, it is possible to work out much of the casting from the seven surviving dramatic 'plots', or scene-by-scene outlines listing entrances, properties, etc., made for use by the stagekeeper and actors, and presumably posted in the tiring-house during a performance (see p. 46). These outlines date from between 1590 and 1602, and are among the Henslowe-Alleyn documents relating mainly to the Admiral's Men and the Rose theatre.

The matter of the size of the companies has been confused by two considerations. One is the indication, on the title-pages of a number of early play texts printed between 1559 and 1585, of the minimum number of actors necessary to perform the play, usually between four and six.⁹⁵ Two later printed plays also have casting indications. The anonymous, and probably old, play *Mucedorus*, first printed 1598, shows how thirteen parts may be played by eight actors (in an enlarged version of 1610 the parts are arranged for ten actors). *The Fair Maid of the Exchange* (printed 1602) shows how 'Eleven may easily act this comedy', which has twenty parts in all. The casting directions in early printed plays probably relate to performances by small touring companies. After the professional London theatres became established, the main London companies toured the provinces in times of plague, and although the number in a travelling company is rarely specified in contemporary documents, there could be as many as twenty, as at Plymouth in 1618-19 and at Norwich in 1634, or as few as fourteen.⁹⁶ These figures presumably included

⁹² Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 147-8.

⁹³ Henslowe's *Diary*, p. 88; another play was read at an unnamed tavern in May 1602; see p. 201.

⁹⁴ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 218-9.

⁹⁵ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III.179. ⁹⁶ Bentley, *Profession of Player*, pp. 184-6.

The platt of The second parte of
the Seven Deadly Sinnes

& A tent being pitched on the stage for Henry
 the first. So in it & lodge 2000 The Gentlemen
 of the court & 2000 of the Duke & a number
 of the Lord R. Rollant to them. Pride Gluttony
 wrath & Covetousness at one door at an other
 door Envy Sloth & Lechery The three put
 lock the four. and so Exeunt

Heavy Annals Enter L. Page & Singer to him
a servant T. Bell To him Ligate and the
Cooper Exit Then enter again. Then Envy
presents over the stage. Ligate speaks

Aschmitt - Dumb Row

[illegible]

Later ferrex round to Drum and Colours and Soldiers
one way Harry. Kir. & Conly John Duke. to them
At a nether door ferrex drum and Colours and Soldiers
to Sir. & Pallant John Sincler J. & Holland.

Enter ~~Queen~~ Quene. wth 2 Com/sailors. wth Brian
the Gable. to them ferreux and Porrex feucralmines
wth ~~the~~ Drums and Power. Gorboduc entreing in
the mid^d between Henry speaks

Larum wth Excursions After
Nisgate Peaks

Inter ferre and Ferre severally Gerolamo
Mia following them Lucius and Damasus wth by
T. 2nd.

Enter ferrex at one dore. Porrex at an other. The
figs ferrex is layn: to them vidend be Quene
to Sir Haman: to him Lucius.

Enter Porrex, sad wth Jordan his man. Q. P. 10. M.
To them the Queen and the Cadie Nick Samnder.
And Vonds 2 Conly m^r Brian. To them Vucius Rmings.

Henry and Lidgat speak. Mobs puffeth over

Enter Giraldus Pbricus Abbatia Comperia Lodov
R Conih. T. Gualde. R. G. N. N. N.

Enter Sardinapalus Arbactus Nicanor and
Captains marching, m. Philippe m. Type & La
Rit & Sinder. J. Holland.

1774. A Captain 10th Hussars and the Cadets 2nd Lt

Lidgat Beach

[illegible]

Fater Sardanapa. Ist die Vadies to them A
Nessinger. Ist Gadale. Ist mi will fude
Pueri. Ist Larum.

Their Troachus pursuing Sardanapalus
 and his V^o 10th by the Enter Sarda
 napolis man, jewels robes and Gold as he ce
 der-y. Plurum

Inter Arbustus Nicanor and the other Captain
in triumph of the Pope & Pa. A. in of Hull & Con of Sea.
Henry Speaks and Vidgate Victory passes
over the Sea.

(T. 100. T. 101. "B. 100. 101. P. 101")

Burroughes & Co

Winter Prognosis for the Lord Samuel - with
A Duke to Dr. Henry.

Enter Philomeli and Torus to 3rd m Julio

Enter Progne Zanthea ftis and Cord. Sander

I Bell told us by Harry B. Gaudale to them
 from the Lord. B. Burlingame & Dub R. Conly

1. 2nd Hand Rev. Widgate Speaker

Enter Brogue wth the sampler to her Torrey
from Hunting wth six Vords to them Philomeli
wth six Vords in a dis^t. Mercury Comes and all
Vords to him 3 Vords to Gadale Mary wth six.

Henry speaks to Sir Lieutenant Darguenn
and roaners Remy & Duke. & Holland of
sincler. to them Warwick. n° Brian

Lidgate speaks to the
Audience and to
Emily.

usually been argued that Shakespeare wrote for between thirteen and sixteen actors throughout his career.

The fact is that there is no necessary connection between the practice of doubling, or the minimum number of actors required, and the size of the company. The professional companies after 1576 staged a number of plays with up to fifty speaking parts. For some of these, the company may have had to rope in everyone available. The 'plot' of *The Battle of Alcazar* (?1598) names twenty-four actors, and that of *1 Tamar Cham* (1602) names twenty-nine, while Peele's *Edward 1* (1591; in production at the Rose 1595-6) has one scene requiring twenty-three players to be on stage. A manuscript play, *The Two Noble Ladies* (Red Bull, 1622), has prompt notes calling for a stagekeeper to come on in non-speaking roles as a guard and a soldier. I suspect it was not often necessary to resort to such expedients, for most of the extant repertory of plays in the period have casts normally of around twelve to fifteen speaking roles, with a few other walk-on parts. In the cast lists in plays published in the 1620s, the King's Men seem to have used between six and eight sharers, about four hired men, and four boys.⁹⁷ In playing a daily repertory, the companies needed to protect their leading actors, and the extant cast lists suggest that in the 1620s only half to two-thirds of the sharers, and by no means all the hired men, would perform in any one play. The company at this time was quite large: in 1624, the Master of the Revels listed twenty-one names of hired men, 'musicians and other necessary attendants', as attached to the King's Men, in addition to the eleven principal actors or sharers.⁹⁸ The companies had to maintain musicians, keepers of the wardrobe (two were employed at Salisbury Court in 1634), stage-keepers, prompters, and gatherers to collect money at the doors. It is not known whether Herbert's list included all of these, or any of these, but if we set the thirty-three names he gives against the twenty-nine actors recorded for the Admiral's Men in *1 Tamar Cham* twenty years earlier, it looks as though the major London companies each had more than thirty people on the payroll.

The only late cast list for a play with a huge number of parts, at least forty-four, is that in the manuscript of Massinger's *Believe as You List* (1631), in which seventeen members (seven sharers, ten hired men) of the King's Men are named to assigned roles, but a number of roles, including all female parts, have no names attached to them. The doubling for this play was very intricate, and divided some small roles, as well as two sizeable speaking parts, between two, or in one case, that of the character Demetrius, three actors. Such doubling shows little regard for individuality in all but the

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251. ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-6.

main roles in plays of this kind. However, this was an exception, and it would have been practicable for a company of about thirty to thirty-five comfortably to maintain a repertory consisting of plays with, as a norm, eight to twelve significant speaking parts. Even so, an actor's life must have been hectic, especially in the 1590s, when the Admiral's and Chamberlain's Men were competing in bringing out a stream of new plays. For instance, in April 1597 the Admiral's Men, playing on twenty-five days out of thirty, performed thirteen different plays; three were new, and two of them were played several times, but five plays were each staged only once.⁹⁹ We have no records of the daily repertories later in the period to show whether the custom of presenting a different play almost every day persisted.

There was a temporary explosion in the number of playhouses after 1600, when the children's theatres began to vie with the public stages, and one visitor to London in 1611 said that seven were playing daily.¹⁰⁰ By 1617 the number of companies working regularly stabilized at four (Globe/Blackfriars, Cockpit/Phoenix, Fortune, Red Bull), and the Salisbury Court was added in 1629 to make five. In these later years the companies still competed for the services of the better playwrights, but also used an accumulated repertory of old plays which had stood the test of time, and suited their particular audience. An actor's life may therefore have been less strenuous than in the 1590s. For all their sweat, there was, of course, plenty of glamour and excitement, and we can catch a glimpse of this in Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*, played at the Fortune about 1610: in a speech that, as so often in plays of this period, has a double application, Sir Alexander, showing his own mansion to other characters, in fact describes the theatre as if he were playing to a full house:

Nay, when you look into my galleries,
 How bravely they are trimmed up, you all shall swear
 You're highly pleased to see what's set down there:
 Stories of men and women, mixed together,
 Fair ones with foul, like sunshine in wet weather –
 Within one square a thousand heads are laid
 So close that all of heads the room seems made;
 As many faces there, filled with blithe looks
 Show like the promising titles of new books
 Writ merrily, the readers being their own eyes,
 Which seem to move and to give plaudities;
 And here and there, whilst with obsequious ears
 Thronged heaps do listen, a cut-purse thrusts and leers

⁹⁹ Henslowe's *Diary*, pp. 57–8.

¹⁰⁰ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, II.369.

With hawk's eyes for his prey – I need not show him:
 By a hanging villainous look yourselves may know him,
 The face is drawn so rarely. Then, sir, below,
 The very floor, as 'twere, waves to and fro,
 And, like a floating island, seems to move
 Upon a sea bound in with shores above. (1.2.14–32)

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2

A. R. BRAUNMULLER

The arts of the dramatist

Music and poetry were first approved
By common sense; and that which pleased most
Held most allowed pass; no, rules of art
Were shaped to pleasure, not pleasure to your rules.
(John Marston, *What You Will*, Induction)

THEATRES, like universities, are among society's most conservative institutions. When the theatre admits or achieves innovation it is more often spasmodic than prolonged, intense rather than gradual, and the old long lingers beside the new. In the playhouse, any balance struck between this *obligato* to tradition and the *ad libitum* of change requires collaboration: audiences and playwrights and theatre managements must to some extent agree or the institution will collapse economically. When entrepreneurs risked the capital required to erect permanent theatres in the 1560s and 1570s and actors joined into formally organized companies, they created a staggering, and continuing, demand for new material.¹ Seeking to attract and hold an audience, dramatists and theatre companies supplied jigs, folk tales, jingoistic war plays, courtly pastoral, and much else. Gradually, audiences and companies found one another, and in the later reign of Elizabeth I and in the reigns of her first two Stuart successors, the London theatre world stratified according to a match of styles and tastes.² Of all the companies, only the King's Men, formerly the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the company of Shakespeare,

¹ By the 1590s, the repertory was very large: Philip Henslowe records that the Lord Admiral's Men performed twenty-eight times, from 15 September to 15 October 1595, in eighteen different plays. Three plays were performed on three occasions each; three more, including a lost two-part play, twice each; eleven plays were performed once each. See Philip Henslowe, *Henslowe's Diary*, pp. 31–2. For an estimate of the number of new plays produced each half-decade from 1595 to 1639, see table 10 of L. G. Salingar, Gerald Harrison, and Bruce Cochrane, 'Les Comédiens et leur public en Angleterre de 1520 à 1640' in Jacquot *et al.*, comp., *Dramaturgie et société*, 11.525–76.

² See Gurr, *Playgoing*, pp. 155–6 and 183, and above, pp. 36–8 for qualification.

John Fletcher, and Phillip Massinger, offered a broadly appealing repertory that mixed innovative plays with old ones, or new ones in the old styles.

In the 1580s and 1590s, a talented but for the most part short-lived generation – the ‘University Wits’ (Christopher Marlowe, George Peele, Robert Greene, John Lyly, Thomas Nashe, and Thomas Lodge), along with two men who did not attend Oxford or Cambridge, Shakespeare and Thomas Kyd – supplied plays for the newly professionalized adult and semi-professional boys’ companies.³ Achieving a theatrical sophistication unprecedented in secular drama, many of these plays had decades-long lives in repertory. To set themselves apart from this group, the next dramatic generation – self-consciously innovative playwrights like John Marston and Ben Jonson, for example – parodies and ridicules their predecessors, scrambles the audience’s expectations, and violates recently agreed conventions. As Marston and Jonson did, so do the dramatists who follow them, creating the crescendo of fashions common in artistically inventive and politically volatile eras like late Elizabethan London or, more recently, Weimar Germany. Shakespeare might declare a stock figure old-fashioned – ‘Pat! He comes like the catastrophe of the old comedy’ (*King Lear*, 1.2.128) – and Jonson might deride Shakespeare’s staging of battles ‘with three rusty swords, / And help of some few foot-and-half-foot words’ (*Every Man in his Humour*, Prologue, 9–10), but their views most assuredly do not mean that either the stock figure or the dramatic technique were out of favour with the, or a, London audience. That ‘old-fashioned’ dramatic strategies continued to please means there were successful, popular dramatists – Thomas Heywood, for instance, or Thomas Dekker – who did not need to adopt current fashion fully, or at all. A chronological account of dramaturgy, of the dramatist’s arts, from the 1580s onward would therefore either falsify the story or present a chaos in which every aesthetic choice was virtually co-present with every other, even if that account avoided the trap of claiming a teleological, ‘progressive’ development.

My approach here assumes that in early modern English drama (and for that matter, in early modern continental drama) there exists a group of technical issues and solutions clustered around impersonation and the representing of action. These topics shape my argument. Some of the issues and solutions now appear quaint or puzzling, some have not changed since Aristotle.⁴ Throughout, I try to remember that audiences, not rules, come

³ Of this group, Greene, Kyd, Marlowe, and Peele were all dead, and only Shakespeare was active as a dramatist, by 1600; see my *George Peele*, pp. 126–8 and 131–2.

⁴ See Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (1968; New York, 1978), p. 16: ‘A living theatre that thinks it can stand aloof from anything so trivial as fashion must be reconceived, and its new conception will bear the marks of all the influences that surround it. In this sense, the theatre is relativity. Yet a great theatre is not a fashion house; perpetual elements do recur

first. Marston's remarks in *What You Will* (the epigraph above) are less familiar than Dr Johnson's 'The drama's laws the drama's patrons give / For we that live to please, must please to live', but Marston and Johnson both address the same brute case, at once economic and as mysterious as human delight in mimicry. Yet the ways of pleasing may be analysed and formulated, even if they never occurred to a single playwright as a recipe nor to a single playgoer as a requirement. This approach might imply that drama is all, or only, technique. Not true. Making a play and its meanings, conscious and unconscious, aural and literary, personal and social, are communal and interdependent activities. No discursive narrative can ever fully represent those conditions. As an apologetic substitute, I begin by attempting to undermine the dramatist's supposed priority and authority. I begin with the difficulty of specifying the dramatist's arts.

Drama and performance

Dramaturgy, which at first glance seems so much a textual phenomenon, and performance, most evanescent of experiences, are deeply allied. They create a transient moment arising from, perhaps preserved in, a residual code. Consider the induction to John Marston's *Antonio and Mellida* (1602). The first stage direction lists six characters who enter *with parts in their hands, having cloaks cast over their apparel*. That is, each actor carries the manuscript of his speeches and cues; their cloaks conventionally indicate travel – the boy actors have just arrived at the theatre. Overlaying their *apparel*, the costumes appropriate to their fictional characters, *cloaks* also identify this episode as half-theatrical, a semi-staged moment.⁵

Galeatzo asks, 'Are ye ready, are ye perfect?'

PIERO Faith, we can say our parts; but we are ignorant in what mould we must cast our actors.

ALBERTO Whom do you personate?

PIERO Piero, Duke of Venice.

ALBERTO O, ho; then thus frame your exterior shape

To haughty form of elate majesty

As if you held the palsy-shaking head

Of reeling chance under your fortune's belt

In strictest vassalage; grow big in thought

As swoll'n with glory of successful arms.

(Induction, 2–12)

and certain fundamental issues underlie all dramatic activity. The deadly trap is to divide the eternal truths from the superficial variations.'

⁵ On costumes and make-up, see Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, pp. 85–8 and MacIntyre, *Costumes and Scripts in the Elizabethan Theatres*; on props, see Dessen, *Elizabethan Stage Conventions*, pp. 33–5, 51, 91–8.

Each of the six is in turn 'cast' into the appropriate, stereotyped 'mould', sometimes giving a sketch of the stock characterization, sometimes speaking the language of the part:

ALBERTO ...one [the fool, *Barludo*] whose foppish nature might seem create[d] only for wise men's recreation, and like a juiceless bark, to preserve the sap of more strenuous spirits. A servile hound that loves the scent of forerunning fashion ...

FOROBOSCO Ha, ha, ha; tolerably good; good, faith, sweet wag.

ALBERTO Umph; why 'tolerably good; good faith, sweet wag'? Go, go; you flatter me.

FOROBOSCO Right; I but dispose my speech to the habit of my part.

(33-6, 40-3)

Metaphors of costume ('fashion', 'habit', 'suit') describe the actors' donning of their off-the-peg roles:

FELICHE Rampum scampum, mount tufty *Tamburlaine*! What rattling thunderclap breaks from his lips?

ALBERTO O, 'tis native to his part. For acting a modern *Bragadoch* under the person of *Matzagente*, the Duke of Milan's son, it may seem to suit with good fashion of coherence.

(86-90)

Confronted with his 'part' and nothing else, the actor personating Feliche complains that he doesn't know how his character fits into the play: 'I have a part allotted to me which I have neither able apprehension to conceit nor what I conceit gracious ability to utter' (99-100).

The induction suits Marston's play, where constricting routines of character are 'part' of the point, and life is theatricized to an acme of affectation. When Antonio complains about having to play 'two parts in one', Alberto, who will himself double 'Alberto' and *Andrugio* (21-3), rebukes him: 'Not play two parts in one? Away, away; 'tis common fashion. Nay, if you cannot bear two subtle fronts under one hood, idiot go by, go by, off this world's stage. O time's impurity!' (73-6). Recalling a catch-phrase ('go by, go by') from *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587) or ridiculing *Tamburlaine* (c. 1587) makes new theatre of these older theatrical moments. As the actors earlier suspected, idiosyncratic behaviour fills the play, and Marston leaves narrative coherence to chance and the audience; Feliche worries that 'it is not possible to limn so many persons in so small a tablet as the compass of our plays afford' (132-3). Bedevilled by folly, the same actor-character later exclaims, 'More fools, more rare fools! O, for time and place, long enough and large enough to act these fools! Here might be made a rare scene of folly, if the plat [plot] could bear it' (3.2.117-19). Marston's stage world restages an

earlier stage world, mocks it, and seeks to displace it. Despite what will prove an anarchic, subversive attack on dramatic conventions, the induction also mimics a common theatrical situation – actors rushing, and rushed, to learn their parts, but leaving both ‘character’ and coherence to their professional experience and the spectators’ familiarity with other plays.⁶

Given the theatre’s insistent demand for new material and a repertory system that often saw three or more different plays performed in a single week, rehearsals and performances must sometimes have been chaotic: a mad hurry simply to memorize or recall parts; actors drunk, absent, forgetful, on stage too soon or off too late; improvised lines and gestures to restore the play’s general direction or to take advantage of some topical application or of some spectator in the audience.⁷ Playwrights often complained about how far a performance departed from the texts they had set down; the imaginary Lord Letoy corrects his acting company:

But you, sir, are incorrigible, and
Take licence to yourself to add unto
Your parts your own free fancy, and sometimes
To alter or diminish what the writer
With care and skill composed; and when you are
To speak to your coactors in the scene,
You hold interlocutions with the audients [*sic*] –
(Richard Brome, *The Antipodes* [1638],
2.2.39–45)

The actors’ willingness to make *ad lib.* satirical remarks could sometimes serve as a welcome defence against censorship; on one such occasion George Chapman plaintively – or disingenuously – wrote, ‘I see not my own plays, nor carry the actors’ tongues in my mouth.’⁸

⁶ For studies of how theatre practices might have responded to rapidly changing repertoires and ill-prepared actors, see Bernard Beckerman, ‘Theatrical plots and Elizabethan stage practice’ and William B. Long, ‘*John a Kent and John a Cumber*: an Elizabethan playbook and its implications’ in W. R. Elton and William Ben Long, eds., *Shakespeare and Dramatic Tradition: Essays in Honor of S. E. Johnson* (Newark, Del., 1989), pp. 109–24 and 125–43, respectively.

⁷ Some of the details here I infer from a now-lost contract (1614) between Henslowe and the actor Robert Dawes in which are specified fines ‘for arriving late, for absenteeism, for missing a performance, for drunkenness, or for taking any of the costumes out of the theatre’ (Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe’s Diary* [Cambridge, 1988], pp. 37–8). It seems likely that these were real possibilities or there would have been no reason to try to avert them contractually.

⁸ Chapman’s letter of mid-1608, probably to Sir George Buc, modernized from my transcription in *A Seventeenth-Century Letter-Book* (Newark, Del., 1983); see pp. 246 and 435–7. On actors’ *ad hoc* contributions, see Margot Heinemann’s chapter, below, pp. 173–4.

Professional theatre only recently became the decorous, largely bourgeois event it now usually is. Renaissance public theatre performances, and many private ones also, must often have been a blend of fairly formal public declamation, exaggerated gesture (of the silent film sort), and vaudeville or stand-up comedy. Some members of the public theatre audiences were physically separate from the large open-air stage and hence required lavish and loud acting styles; others pressed close about the stage, or even sat upon it, and they might sometimes arrive uninvited to participate in the spectacle.⁹ Remembering the public theatres of the 1630s, Edmund Gayton recalled 'holidays when sailors, watermen, shoemakers, butchers and apprentices are at leisure':

Then it is good policy to amaze those violent spirits with some tearing tragedy full of fights and skirmishes, as the *Guelphs* and *Ghibellines*, *Greeks* and *Trojans*, or the three London Apprentices, which commonly ends in six acts, the spectators frequently mounting the stage and making a more bloody catastrophe among themselves than the players.

Gayton describes an audience dissatisfied with the actors' offering:

I have known upon one of these festivals, but especially at Shrovetide, where the players have been appointed, notwithstanding their bills to the contrary, to act what the major part of the company [audience] had a mind to; sometimes *Tamerlane*, sometimes *Jurgurth*, sometimes *The Jew of Malta*, and sometimes parts of all these, and at last, none of the three taking, they were forced to undress and put off their tragic habits and conclude the day with *The Merry Milkmaids*. And unless this were done and the popular humour satisfied, as sometimes it fortune[d] that the players were refractory, the benches, the tiles, the laths, the stones, oranges, apples, nuts flew about most liberally, and as there were mechanics [workingmen] of all professions, who fell every one to his own trade and dissolved a house in an instant, and made a ruin of a stately fabric. It was not then the most mimical nor fighting man, [Richard] Fowler, nor Andrew Crane, could pacify; prologues nor epilogues would prevail; the devil and the fool were quite out of favour. Nothing but noise and tumult fills the house.¹⁰

Such rambunctious theatrical conditions had a large and probably now an incalculable impact on dramaturgy.

Other complicating influences are more obvious: the careers of Lyly, Shakespeare, and others show that a single individual might write a play,

⁹ See, for instance, 'A Prologue at the Globe to his Comedy called *The Doubtful Heir* which should have been presented at the Blackfriars': 'But you that can contract yourselves, and sit / As you were now in Blackfriars' pit, / And will not deaf us with lewd noise, or tongues, / Because we have no heart to break our lungs...' (James Shirley, *Poems*, etc. [1646], D4v-5).

¹⁰ Edmund Gayton, *Pleasant Notes upon Don Quixot* (1654), p. 271.

participate in its rehearsal, attend its performance or even join the cast.¹¹ To regard the dramatist's arts as those visible in the surviving manuscript or printed playtexts proves more expedient than defensible. The documents, usually small paper-bound quartos, much less often the manuscripts, have themselves diverse histories, and many printed texts probably bear the undecipherable signs of actors' and book-holders' contributions as well as the dramatists'. When an individual playwright's script 'entered the theatrical O' and consequently entered the communal process of rehearsal and enactment, it 'lost its singleness yet fulfilled its destiny'.¹² Moreover, printed texts may significantly *misrepresent* the dramatist's contribution, for everyone connected with the production and performance of a play would have regarded a printed text as irrelevant to their specifically theatrical activity.

Dramatists and publishers frequently claim the printed text differs from the staged version. Published plays might contain less, or more, or simply different material:

I have purposely omitted and left out some fond and frivolous jestures [*sic*], digressing and, in my poor opinion, far unmeet for the matter, which I thought might seem more tedious unto the wise than any way else to be regarded – though, haply, they have been of some vain conceited fondlings [fools] greatly gaped at, what times they have showed upon the stage in their graced [i.e., enacted?] deformities.

(Richard Jones's preface to Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* [printed 1590])

I would inform you that this book, in all numbers, is not the same with that which was acted on the public stage, wherein a second pen had good share; in place of which I have rather chosen to put weaker (and no doubt less pleasing) of mine own, than to defraud so happy a genius of his right by my loathed usurpation.

(Jonson's preface to *Sejanus* [printed 1605])

Courteous Reader: You shall find in this book more than was presented upon the stage, and left out of the presentation, for superfluous length (as some players pretended). I thought good all should be inserted according to the allowed [i.e., licensed] original.

(Richard Brome's note appended to *The Antipodes* [printed 1640])

¹¹ See David Klein, 'Did Shakespeare produce his own plays?', *MLR* 57 (1962), 356–60; Bernard Beckerman, 'Philip Henslowe' in Joseph W. Donohue, Jr, ed., *The Theatrical Manager in England and America* (Princeton, N.J., 1971), pp. 19–62, esp. pp. 53–9; Stern, *Rehearsal from Shakespeare to Sheridan*. For playwrights who attended their own plays, see Gurr, *Playgoing*, pp. 193, 194, 199.

¹² Stanley Wells, *Re-Editing Shakespeare for the Modern Reader* (Oxford, 1984), p. 111; see also Stephen Orgel, 'Authentic Shakespeare', *Representations* 21 (Winter, 1988), 1–25.

Playwrights sold their plays to an acting company, and it was a rare author – Ben Jonson is the most notorious example – who sought fame or money by printing his plays. Except for those who hoped to profit by performing a published text of another company's play (apparently a rare circumstance), the theatrical world regarded the printed text as something that followed, sometimes by decades, rather than preceded or accompanied their activities. (Printed texts did, however, serve as promptbooks, at least for touring performances and for revivals long after or far distant from original production.)¹³

Authors' and publishers' prefaces to plays clearly distinguish the experience of *reading* a play from that of *seeing* or *hearing* (the two standard words) it performed and almost unanimously prefer performance:

I shall entreat...that the unhandsome shape which this trifle in reading presents may be pardoned for the pleasure it once afforded you when it was presented with the lively soul of action.

(Marston, preface to *The Malcontent* [printed 1604])

If any should wonder why I print a comedy, whose life rests much in the actors' voice, let such know that it cannot avoid publishing; let it therefore stand with good excuse that I have been my own setter out.

(Marston, preface to *The Fawn* [printed 1606])

A great part of the grace of this (I confess) lay in action; yet can no action ever be gracious, where the decency of the language, and ingenious structure of the scene [stage], arrive not to make up a perfect harmony.

(Webster, preface to *The Devil's Law-Case* [printed 1623])

...scenical representation is so far from giving just cause of any least diminution, that the personal and exact life it gives to any history, or other such delineation of human actions, adds to them lustre, spirit, apprehension...

(Chapman, dedication to *Caesar and Pompey* [printed 1631])

...though it [the published play] appear not in that natural dress of the scene, nor so powerful, as when it had the soul of action.

(Shirley, dedication to *The Brothers* [printed 1652])

When a play failed in performance, however, printing could appeal to a different jury. Webster in the preface to *The White Devil* (1612) and Walter Burre, the publisher of Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607),

¹³ See C. R. Baskervill, 'A prompt copy of *A Looking Glass for London and England*', *MP* 30 (1932–3), 29–31, and C. J. Sisson, 'Shakespeare Quartos as prompt-copies', *RES* 18 (1942), 129–43.

both make this appeal, but no one more vividly than Dekker in his preface to *The Whore of Babylon* (1607):

But of this my knowledge cannot fail, that in such consorts [casts], many of the instruments are for the most part out of tune, and no marvel; for let the poet set the note of his numbers even to Apollo's own lyre, the player will have his own crochets, and sing false notes, in despite of all the rules of music . . . if this of mine be made a cripple by such means, yet despise him [the play] not for that deformity which struck not upon him at his birth, but fell upon him by misfortune, and in recompense of such favour, you shall (if your patience can suffer for so long) hear now how himself can speak.

Further complicating a straightforward understanding of the dramatist's arts from the surviving scripts is the fact that every professional dramatist worked within an embracing set of performance conventions, so an apparently individual touch may prove to be one writer's variation on a long-lived conventional substratum. That conventional base might originate with the actors, or the physical structure of the playhouse, or any number of other performance conditions quite distinct from the human playwright and his theatrical co-workers. So diverse were late-Tudor and Stuart performance conditions – large 'public' amphitheatres, smaller and more expensive 'private' theatres, royal palaces, aristocratic houses, and city streets or civic halls, theatre companies enduring for decades or existing for a few plague-filled months – that it is futile to dogmatize about the playwright's contribution to the theatrical experience. Even within the putatively well-defined conditions of London's professional theatre, patchy surviving testimony means any single retrospective pattern is probably an historical fiction.

Another central complication arises from the function of language, that is, represented speech by and among the characters. Speech has a more dominant role in the non-illusionistic Renaissance theatre than in later, increasingly illusionistic theatres. Spoken text prompts the audience's imaginative participation and conveys many of the *circumstances* of speech which an illusionistic theatre communicates in other, often technological ways.¹⁴ Thus, dramatic speech establishes the time of day:

What though we have lost our way in the woods, yet never hang thy head . . . for . . . I will warrant thy life tonight for twenty in the hundred . . . What? To lose our way in the wood without either fire or candle . . .

(Peele, *The Old Wives Tale* [1590–4], 2–6, 8–10)

¹⁴ See Ellis-Fermor, *Jacobean Drama*, and Raymond Williams, *Drama in Performance* (1968; rev. edn Harmondsworth, 1972).

See how the Hours, the guardant of heaven's gate,
Have by their toil removed the darksome clouds,
That Sol may well discern the trampled pace
Wherein he wont to guide his golden car.

(*Arden of Faversham* [1591], 10.1-4)

or identifies part of the theatre structure:

Let us assault this kingly tower by Damascus
Where all their conduits and fountains are;
Then we may easily take the city too.

(Peele, *David and Bethsabe* [c. 1587], 180-2)

Now hang our bloody colours by Damascus,
Reflexing hues of blood upon their heads
While they walk quivering in their city walls,
Half dead for fear before they feel my wrath.

(Marlowe, *Tamburlaine, Part 2* [c. 1588],
4.4.1-4)

or identifies persons and places:

The sun doth beat upon the plain [open] fields, wherefore let us sit down,
Gallathea, under this fair oak, by whose broad leaves being defended from the
warm beams we may enjoy the fresh air which softly breathes from Humber
floods.

(Lyly, *Gallathea* [c. 1584], 1.1.2ff.)

Now, masters of our academic state,
That rule in Oxford, viceroys in your place,

...

Why flock you thus to Bacon's secret cell,
A friar newly stalled in Brazen-nose?

(Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*
[c. 1591], 2.6-7, 10-11)

When romantic-pastoral comedy and the English history play – genres of the 1590s – fade, innovative drama moves its scenes indoors to throne rooms, back corridors, and bedchambers, to battlefield command posts, to country houses and counting houses, and its exterior scenes tend to be urban rather than rural.¹⁵ Many of Shakespeare's later plays – *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, for instance – are in this respect

¹⁵ Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (London, 1986), chapters 1 and 2, speculates on why the writing of romantic comedy and chronicle history plays declines after 1600. For the later history play, see Judith Doolan Spikes, 'The Jacobean history play and the myth of the elect nation', *RenD* n.s. 8 (1977), 177-94.

And Antonio responds to Delio's later requests – 'Now, sir, your promise: what's that Cardinal?' and 'what's his brother?' – with lengthy verbal portraits similar to the 'character', a popular Jacobean literary genre describing social stereotypes. After Antonio has described the Duchess at admiring length, he alludes to Webster's tactic: 'I'll case the picture up' (1.1.207). With the late nostalgia for things Elizabethan and the return of romantic plots and exotic locales in Cavalier drama, new plays once again moved outdoors, and the older, 'exterior' Elizabethan dramas continued to be revived in the theatres and at court.

Language and rhetoric

The heavily patterned verbal rhetoric of English drama in the 1590s was in many respects word-play writ large. It was 'auricular', appealing first and powerfully to the listener-spectator's rhythmic and auditory sensibilities. Fear energizes successful word-play. A similarity of sound, or spelling, or shape among words or phrases overrides the semantic, conventional, unthinkingly assumed difference between them.¹⁷ Momentarily, the abyss of a linguistic discourse ordered by sound, not sense, stares back. Tidy semantic demarcations – *bare* from *bear*, *know* from *no*, and (for the Elizabethan ear) *room* from *Rome*, and *word* from *world* – collapse, and we glimpse a different order. That glimpse defies 'logical' order, or at least challenges the claim that one order, semantic difference, is naturally or obviously superior to another, phonetic identity. Beyond the increasingly popular and increasingly efficient iambic pentameter cadence, there were the almost incantatory effects – alliteration, repetition, echo, reversal – of the rhetorical figures:

By wasting all, I conquer the world,
 And now to end our difference at last,
 In this last act, note but the deeds of death.
 Where is Erastus now but in my triumph?
 Where are the murderers but in my triumph?
 Where the judge and witnesses but in my triumph?
 Where false Lucina but in my triumph?
 Where's Basilisco but in my triumph?
 Where's faithful Piston but in my triumph?
 (Kyd, *Soliman and Perseda* [c. 1590], 5.5.14–24)

¹⁷ See Sigurd Burckhardt, *Shakespearean Meanings* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), pp. 24–33 and George Puttenham (?), *The Art of English Poesy* (1589): 'auricular figures be those which work alteration in th'ear by sound, accent, time, and slipper volubility in utterance . . . this quality extendeth but to the outward tuning of speech, reaching no higher than th'ear and forcing the mind little or nothing' (111.133).

When disobedience reigneth in the child,
And princes' ears by flattery be beguiled;
When laws do pass by favour, not by truth;
When falsehoods swarmeth both in old and youth;
When gold is made a god to wrong the poor,
And charity exiled from rich men's door;
When men by wit do labour to disprove
The plagues for sin sent down by God above;
When great men's ears are stopped to good advice
And apt to hear those tales that feed their vice;
Woe to the land . . .

(Greene and Lodge, *A Looking Glass for
London and England* [1590], 3.2.205–15)

My late ambition hath distained my faith,
My breach of faith occasioned bloody wars,
Those bloody wars have spent my treasure,
And with my treasure my people's blood,
And with their blood, my joy and best beloved,
My best beloved, my sweet and only son.

(Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, 1.3.33–8)¹⁸

Here we hear the fundamental sound patterns as more immediately appealing, more accessible, than the words' and phrases' struggle to discriminate, define, divide, and categorize.

A discourse that does not separate *nothing* from *noting* or *heir* from *hair* from *here*, a discourse that almost rhymes *blood* with *beloved*, is a Wonderland language and a disturbing one, but it is also an oral, overtly rhetorical, and theatrical one. It is the discourse of high-Elizabethan drama. While 'advanced' fashion and tastes changed, the changes were more superficial than critics sometimes allow; John Fletcher uses rhetorical repetition throughout his influential Jacobean career (c. 1607–25), although he rarely binds the repetition to line units so rigidly as did Kyd and his contemporaries.¹⁹ The older style, too, retained broad appeal: the vitality of *The Spanish Tragedy* (still in the Fortune's repertory in the late 1630s), of 'rampum scampum' *Tamburlaine* (similarly long-lived at the Red Bull),

¹⁸ These passages exemplify the rhetorical figures called 'anaphora' and 'epistrophe' (respectively, words repeated at the beginning and end of successive clauses), 'isocolon' (a series of parallel phrases), 'antimetabole' (words repeated in reverse order), and 'anadiplosis' (words ending one clause repeated at the beginning of the next). For further examples, see Sister Miriam Joseph, CSC, *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York, 1947).

¹⁹ See Cyrus Hoy, 'The language of Fletcherian tragicomedy' in J. C. Gray, ed., *Mirror Up to Shakespeare: Essays in Honour of G. R. Hibbard* (Toronto, 1984), pp. 99–113.

and of *Mucedorus* (c. 1590) demonstrates so much. Court and private theatre audiences who enjoyed Fletcherian 'refinement' or, later, the love-and-honour exercises of Cavalier gentlemen playwrights also welcomed revivals of Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1588; performed at court not long before its first printing in 1633), Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (c. 1603; performed at court in 1634 and 1638), Jonson's comedies and tragedies, and many of Shakespeare's plays through the Stuart period. Old-fashioned and probably simply old when it was first printed in 1598, *Mucedorus* eventually became popular in print and possibly on stage, perhaps because a live bear participated in the performance, or at least one did at court, Shrove Sunday, 1610.²⁰

Dramatic – *spoken*, oratorical – rhetoric was manifestly successful in the Renaissance theatre, but the fashion was not solely theatrical. Patterned speech could also be heard in church, in Parliament, from scaffold and block; indeed, there are powerful arguments for the claim that the Elizabethan auricular rhetoric known to us as a written or printed phenomenon derives historically from centuries-old oral habits.²¹ In a Paul's Cross sermon of 1579, Richard Dylos discusses, even as he employs, various ornaments in sermons, and he ends with a Shakespearian comic deflation:

Some would have long texts, some short texts. Some would have Doctors, Fathers, and Councils; some call that man's doctrine. Some would have it ordered by logic; some term that man's wisdom. Some would have it polished by rhetoric; some call it persuasibleness of words. And again in rhetoric some would have it holy eloquence, liable to the Hebrew and Greek phrase; some would have it proper and fitting to the English capacity. Some love study and learning in sermons; some allow only a sudden motion of the spirit. Some would have all said by heart; some would have oft recourse to the book. Some love gesture, some no gestures. Some love long sermons, some short sermons. Some are coy, and can brook no sermons at all.²²

Or consider the House of Commons, petitioning Elizabeth and feigning that she has considered the dangers of an undecided succession. The House

cannot . . . but acknowledge how your Majesty hath most graciously considered the great dangers and the unspeakable miseries of civil wars; the perilous intermeddlings of foreign princes with seditious, ambitious, and factious subjects at home; the waste of noble houses; the slaughter of people, the subversion of

²⁰ For the play's numerous reprintings and evidence of its stage popularity, see George F. Reynolds, 'Mucedorus, most popular Elizabethan play?' in J. W. Bennett *et al.*, eds., *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama* (New York, 1959), pp. 248–68.

²¹ See Walter J. Ong, SJ, 'Oral residue in Tudor prose style', *PMLA* 80 (1965), 145–54.

²² Modernized from the text quoted in Millar MacLure, *The Paul's Cross Sermons 1534–1642* (Toronto, 1958), p. 146.

towns, intermission of all things pertaining to the maintenance of the realm, unsurity of all men's possessions, lives, and estates; daily interchanging of attainders and treasons.²³

The relentless parallel clauses – the ‘dangers’ and ‘miseries’ – overwhelm, in memory and ear, the single verb, ‘considered’, which they all depend on grammatically.

Political or homiletic uses of auricular rhetoric are, however, deeply different from dramatic uses. The preachers’ and the parliamentarians’ manifest purpose reassures their hearers that design will sooner or later limit rhetoric. For preachers and politicians, circumstance frames and demystifies rhetoric’s power to unsettle. In drama, the end is not known. To learn that end we watch and hear the fiction. Rhetoric’s local effect (persuasion, hortation, lament) may become known, but the plot’s outcome is a mystery. Allied with the plot, the temporal change of the characters’ fortunes, dramatic rhetoric unsettles semantic certainty and thus contributes to a larger arc of suspense rather than using a frame of certitude as a fulcrum. Drama harnesses a continual rhetorical anxiety – the fear that language might regain its primordial union with other sounds – to its own theatrical purposes of suspense and pleasure, the pleasure of a mystery, the pleasure of straining to see and hear something both puzzling and possibly terrifying.

Language and character

Playwrights attribute this rhetoric to their characters, and one form of dramaturgical change is the dramatists’ increasing skill at distinguishing among the characters by discriminating among their ways of speaking. In most plays of the mid-sixteenth century, the characters all sound alike, or at best sort themselves through speaking a limited number of conventional (and therefore tedious) stock vocabularies.²⁴ Marlowe, Kyd, and Peele use action(s) as a way of differentiating among dramatic characters whose other features come largely from the pattern book of classical and native literary traditions. In the next theatrical generation – Shakespeare, Jonson, Chapman – the playwrights, especially in comedy, begin to discriminate their characters through tricks of style or vocabulary, but also to display, especially in tragedy, the

²³ Quoted from Mortimer Levine, *The Early Elizabethan Succession Question 1558–1568* (Stanford, Calif., 1966), p. 48.

²⁴ We infer the imaginary construct ‘character’ from the dramatic personage’s speech and acts, so stock vocabularies and stock or type characterizations are reciprocal. See for example my ‘Characterization through language in the early plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries’ in K. Muir, J. L. Halio, and D. J. Palmer, eds., *Shakespeare, Man of the Theater* (Newark, Del., 1983), pp. 128–47.

more complicated skills needed to give a single character several levels of speech (intimate and public, for example, or equal-to-equal and superior-to-inferior).

The scene in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) where Beatrice-Joanna offers money and De Flores demands her virginity as the reward for murdering her fiancé Alonzo de Piraquo is a magnificently orchestrated negotiation over levels of diction. The scene is consequently also filled with invitations to infer 'character'. Beatrice begins with a mincing alliteration and a calculated balance between the formal 'you, sir' and the more intimate 'thy': 'Look you, sir, here's three thousand florins; / I have not meanly thought upon thy merit' (3.4.62-3). When De Flores rejects the three thousand florins – 'What, salary? Now you move me' – and, incredible to Beatrice-Joanna, then rejects six thousand – 'You take a course / To double my vexation; that's the good you do' – all she can suppose is that De Flores is as embarrassed to name a sum as she is embarrassed and puzzled by his anger. Ethically jejune, she imagines him financially fastidious:

I prithee make away with all speed possible.
 And if thou be'st so modest not to name
 The sum that will content thee, paper blushes not;
 Send thy demand in writing, it shall follow thee,
 But prithee take thy flight. (78-82)

'Prithee' and, earlier, 'Bless me!' – language Shakespeare's Hotspur would consider suitable for a comfit-maker's wife – begin to sound strange alongside the now exclusive use of *thee* and *thou*. Soon, De Flores impatiently tries to kiss Beatrice; when she resists, he threatens, 'I will not stand so long to beg 'em shortly.' Her pronoun marks the first sign of a conscious alliance between instigator, a sonnet-mistress, and the villain, a market-economist: 'Take heed, De Flores, of forgetfulness; / 'Twill soon betray *us*' (95-6; my italics). De Flores claims equality in sin stipulates equality in sexual desire: 'Justice invites your blood to understand me', and Beatrice struggles to re-establish a barrier of politeness, of verbal decorum. For her, the deed spoken is worse than the deed done:

Speak it yet further off that I may lose
 What has been spoken and no sound remain on't.
 I would not hear so much offence again
 For such another deed. (103-6)

Throughout the scene, diction is character, and action is debate over socially typed language. De Flores soon delivers the play's most famous line. 'Y'are the deed's creature' (138): Beatrice-Joanna is 'what the act has made you'

(136). Commanding Alonzo's death (re)created Beatrice. Action, verbal action, is character; it makes the dramatic 'creature'. Yet De Flores is only half right, for they are both also creatures of their chosen languages. Proportions vary from scene to scene, even moment to moment, but action and language, 'deed' and 'sound', everywhere construct the play's creatures. As this analysis implies, early modern English playwrights apparently composed in scenic units, in short stretches of sequential actions and speech. Characters that manifest a thoroughgoing psychological consistency, the quality so prized in the classical novel and the realistic theatre, are consequently quite uncommon, or at least an accidental or subordinate feature, in early modern English drama.²⁵

Looking back, we may infer that a continuing technical ambition for later Elizabethan dramatists was anchoring purpose within a play's represented agents. Older methods of propelling an action and manipulating the change of the agents' fortunes in time located purpose and *telos* outside human interaction and employed frame structures involving divine or legendary beings, or introduced hypostatized emotions and values as allegorical participants. Changing dramatic techniques in the 1580s and 1590s are part of complex cultural phenomena – the 'interiorization' of experience, the creation of models for human individuality – that appear everywhere, from ethical argument (over usury, for example) and economic behaviour (joint-stock companies, for instance) to religious controversy and parliamentary debate.²⁶ The over-full sixth chapter of Aristotle's *Poetics* suggests that audiences deduce character (*ethos*) from judging the agent's *action*, specifically the imaginary personage's (ethical) acts of choice. Aristotle's claim hovers on the edge of type-characterization, precisely the effect English dramatists of this period apparently wanted to avoid. Or rather, they seem to have sought to obscure that effect, for *any* represented agent is to some degree necessarily 'typed', a reductive product of past dramatic characters and conventional aesthetic and cultural expectations.

²⁵ The theatrical practice of doubling or trebling roles and of dividing roles among two or more actors (see above, pp. 46–9) might further diminish psychological verisimilitude while emphasizing the cast's virtuosity. For a concise account of how conventions, especially of character, represent 'the experience in the Elizabethan social context', see Robert R. Hellinga, 'Elizabethan dramatic conventions and Elizabethan reality', *RenD* n.s. 12 (1981), 27–49; see also next note.

²⁶ The second part of Jacob Burckhardt's classic *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860; trans. S. C. G. Middlemore, 1878) is called 'The Development of the Individual', but Burckhardt describes a form of socio-political individualism rather than of interiority or the 'subject'. On the latter, see, for instance, Ernst Cassirer, *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. M. Domandi (Oxford, 1963), chapter 4; Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*, pp. 249–71; Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, chapter 2; and for analysis of the debate, John Lee, *Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and the Controversies of the Self* (Oxford, 2000).

Seeking dramatic individuation, seeking to make the three or four or five universal plots and the one or two or three 'types' or agent-functions those plots require into varied entertainment, playwrights elaborately developed their characters' verbal analysis of their own actions. Characters talk about motive and purpose because the playwright hopes the audience will imagine them independent agents. One method, perhaps the oldest, is simple declaration:

A woeful man, O Lord, am I, to see him in this case.
My days I deem desires their end; this deed will help me hence,
To have the blossoms of my field destroyed by violence.
(Preston, *Cambises* [c. 1565], 5.570-3)

Thus have I with an envious forged tale
Deceived the king, betrayed mine enemy,
And hope for guerdon of my villainy.
(Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, 1.3.93-5)

Related to simple declaration are speeches in which a character describes emotions from the outside:

He's gone, and for his absence thus I mourn.
Did never sorrow go so near my heart
As doth the want of my sweet Gaveston;
And could my crown's revenue bring him back,
I would freely give it to his enemies,
And think I gained, having bought so dear a friend.

...

My heart is as an anvil unto sorrow,
Which beats upon it like the Cyclops' hammers,
And with the noise turns up my giddy brain,
And makes me frantic for my Gaveston.

(Marlowe, *Edward II* [1592], 1.4.304-9, 311-14)

Here, the script does not allow the actor playing Edward to *be* 'frantic' at Gaveston's banishment, or to enact that frenzy. Rather, the actor *says* Edward is frantic.

Humanist rhetorical education stressed adversarial combat, finding or creating 'the' two sides of a controversial topic and arguing each against the other. As an educational phenomenon, this binary bias probably derives from legal practice and from humanism's claim to educate counselors who see and analyse all (but in practice two) sides of a question. As a dramatic phenomenon, the bias produces a bifurcated speaker, two voices in one:

Yet might she love me for my valiancy,
Ay, but that's slandered by my captivity.
Yet might she love me to content her sire,
Ay, but her reason masters his desire.
Yet might she love me as her brother's friend,
Ay, but her hopes aim at some other end.
Yet she might love me to uprear her state,
Ay, but perhaps she hopes some nobler mate.
Yet might she love me as her beauty's thrall,
Ay, but I fear she cannot love at all.

(*The Spanish Tragedy*, 2.1.19–28)

Keeping the rhetorical figure (a form of epanorthosis) and letting the sense go produces Jonson's parody, which shuffles quotations of Kyd:

O, she is wilder and more hard, withal,
Than beast, or bird, or tree, or stony wall
Yet might she love me to uprear her state,
Ay, but perhaps she hopes some nobler mate.
Yet might she love me to content her sire,
Ay, but her reason masters her desire.
Yet might she love me as her beauty's thrall,
Ay, but I fear, she cannot love at all.

(Jonson, *Poetaster* [1601], 3.4.189–96)

Numerous variations were rung on this two-speakers-in-one device. A character might ask, then answer, a question: 'What is beauty saith my sufferings, then?' (*Tamburlaine, Part I*, 5.1.160); 'To be, or not to be, that is the question.' Or the character could address an abstraction or a personified self:

Ah, life and soul still hover in his breast
And leave my body senseless as the earth,
Or else unite you to his life and soul,
That I may live and die with Tamburlaine!

(*Tamburlaine, Part I*, 3.2.21–4)

Now, Bajazeth, abridge thy baneful days
And beat thy brains out of thy conquered head,
Since other means are all forbidden me
That may be ministers of my decay.

(5.1.286–9)

The printed text of Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599) opens with a series of short prose sketches entitled 'The Characters of the Persons'. Fastidius Brisk, for example, is described as

A neat, spruce, affecting courtier, one that wears clothes well and in fashion; practiseth by his glass how to salute; speaks good remnants (notwithstanding the base viol and tobacco); swears tersely, and with variety; cares not what lady's favour he belies, or great man's familiarity: a good property to perfume the boot of a coach...

By 'character' Jonson does not quite mean the imaginary, imitated human traits attributed to and distinguishing among the play's personae. The word has a more technical meaning: a description of a type of human behaviour, an abstract form of something we might call a 'vignette'. Yet the dramatic sense of *character* is not far away since, among other things, these 'characters' do discriminate among the persons of the play, and many are so precise they almost lose the generalizing quality typical of the literary character. (When the literary character became a popular Jacobean genre, many appear to have been based on identifiable individuals.) The dramaturgical relevance of these 'characters' becomes clear when Jonson concludes the list: 'Mitis, is a person of no action, and therefore we afford him no character.' We do not need a profile of, nor can we infer psychological attributes for, an agent who does not act. A prefatory description of Mitis is irrelevant, perhaps even impossible, since his attributes will not be exhibited in or confirmed by the play's action. 'Character', then, in the common if complicated dramatic sense, is interdependent with action, with the personage's acts of choice, behaviour, and relation with other personages. This interdependence means that character and the effective arrangement of the characters' actions cannot be plausibly separated in our experience of a play, although Aristotle apparently thought the practising playwright could separate them, and needed to, as he composed.

The arrangement of action

Classical or neo-classical plays arrange their plots differently from most Elizabethan plays, and the main contrasts outline English practice. Instead of entering the action near or at the crisis, English plays embrace a long temporal period, prodigally representing action mimetically rather than through retrospective narrative, messenger speeches, dialogues with confidants, and the like. (Stephen Gosson's attack, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* [1582], indicates the Elizabethan association of a dramatic *act* with the neo-classical unity of *action*. Temporal leaps in English Renaissance plays never occur within a scene, and the largest ones tend to occur between acts, when a play is so organized.) Instead of concentrating on a small cast closely linked by family ties or social function, confined spatially, and engaged in a single

action, as classical drama does, English popular drama ranges far in space as well as time, employs diverse, sometimes discrete, sets of characters, and places them in varied actions whose formal relation often proves vague or uncertain.

Even when Elizabethan playwrights observe the age-old preference for historical or legendary sources in tragic (or 'serious') drama, they and their successors often adopt the biographical, 'whole life' plot anathemized by Aristotle but familiar to English audiences from morality drama. Thus, for example, *Tamburlaine's* success spawned numerous rags-to-realms conqueror plays down through Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* and beyond. This expansive biographical formula easily assimilated – in *Cambises* or *Edward II* – another medieval formula, the *de casibus* ('of falls') pattern that represents the rise and especially the fall (*casus*) of its characters.

Comedy, particularly urban and domestic comedy, proves more amenable than tragedy to spatial and temporal compression, even in the Jacobean and Caroline periods when such restrictions appear more frequently in both genres. Beaumont's *The Woman Hater* (1606), which has two rather elaborate main plots but seems to occur between morning and night, *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607), which employs 'comic' duping intrigues and has a near-affinity with *Volpone*, Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610), and Massinger's *The City Madam* (1632) indicate some of the possible plot-arrangements. Despite the drift towards neo-classical 'regularity' that later plays show, minor or tangential episodes continue to threaten multiple actions in every genre. They break free in such plays as Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604), where Cocledemoy's plots develop their own comic momentum, and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* (1613), where demonstrating Young Loveless's prodigality becomes a dramatic end in itself. Elizabethan *nouvelle*- and romance-based plots, now often Spanish rather than French or Italian in origin, reappear in the later Stuart period and continue (in Massinger's *Maid of Honour*, for example) the high-Elizabethan luxuriance of temporal extension, geographical variety, and, sometimes, the near-incoherence of plot with plot. After the legal prohibition of publishing non-dramatic satire (1599) and the revival of the boys' companies in the early 1600s, generic mixture – satiric tragedy, tragicomedy – becomes the norm for avant-garde plays, but as early as *The Spanish Tragedy* Kyd had effectively invented ironic tragedy through adapting comic intrigue.²⁷

One Elizabethan method of arranging a play's action probably derives from medieval allegorical drama: separate, often simultaneous lines of action

²⁷ See Douglas Cole, 'The comic accomplice in Elizabethan revenge tragedy', *RenD* 9 (1966), 125–39.

hardly intersect, or do so in realistically improbable ways, but achieve intellectual coherence and a powerful dramatic interreflection through illustrating a topic or a closely related group of topics. The alteration among these strands of plot has been called 'fugal' narrative, and we do experience them temporally much as we experience varied but repeating musical motifs.²⁸ When strand eventually coheres with strand, the effect recalls Spenser's 'interlacement' in *The Faerie Queene*, where realistically or logically incoherent plots eventually construct an intellectually perceived treatment of a given virtue and its opposite.

This technique appears very widely in John Lyly's drama, most of it written for boy actors. In his *Gallathea* (c. 1584), for instance, three distinct sets of characters appear, each group participates in its own narrative, and the groups and plots rarely intersect. The cast of *Gallathea* is stratified socially and ontologically: Olympian deities (Neptune, Venus, Diana, and Cupid); shepherd fathers (Tityrus, Melebeus) and their beautiful daughters (Gallathea and Phyllida, respectively); three under-age sons (Rafe, Robin, and Dick) of a miller. In a series of expository speeches, Tityrus plays Prospero to Gallathea's Miranda – 'To hear these sweet marvels I would mine eyes were turned also into ears' (1.1.35–6) – and explains that invading Danes long ago destroyed a temple sacred to Neptune. Enraged, the god first flooded the Lincolnshire countryside and then relented slightly on the condition

That every five years' day the fairest and chastest virgin in all the country should be brought unto this tree, and here being bound . . . is left for a peace offering unto Neptune . . . [who sends] a monster called the Agar [i.e., 'eagre', a tidal bore].
(1.1.42–4, 48–9)

This 'monster' devours the virgin or conveys her to Neptune or drowns her – the shepherd does not know which. 'To avoid, therefore, destiny, for wisdom ruleth the stars' (1.1.62), Tityrus has disguised his daughter as a boy. So has Melebeus, who fears Phyllida will be sacrificed, and shortly the two boy-actor girl–boys wander the forest, meet, and fall in love. Gallathea and Phyllida quickly suspect the true state of affairs – 'I fear me he is as I am, a maiden'; 'I fear the boy to be as I am, a maiden' (3.2.29, 32) – but each resolves to love as best she/he may (4.4.37–45). Gallathea and Phyllida evidently share a love that does not require, though it might welcome, physical expression. Remarkably, they share a 'constant faith where there can be no cause of

²⁸ See Hunter, *John Lyly*, pp. 198–9. For the related structure of early romance plays see Brian Gibbons's chapter, below, pp. 201–2.

affection' (5.3.132–3). The fires, melancholy, wild gazes, and broken sleeps of 'unbridled passions' (3.1.56) soon invade the play, however, for truant Cupid has appeared in Lincolnshire to 'play ... pranks' (1.2.32–3) among Diana's nymphs 'under the shape of a silly girl' (2.2.1). His temporary success angers Diana, who seizes the godling: 'thou shalt see that Diana's power shall revenge thy policy and tame this pride' (3.4.79–81). Venus, ignorant and innocent of her son's pranks, demands that Diana be punished for capturing Cupid: 'Neptune, I entreat thee, by no other god than the god of love, that thou evil entreat this goddess of hate' (5.3.36–7). So far, the play (with the exception of the Rafe–Robin–Dick plot) might seem organized as a review of the 'varieties of love' or as a 'chastity–friendship–sensual love' *débat* – the subjects were popular in contemporary prose romances and, apparently, court conversation.

Submerged in these episodes, however, are conflicts in the relations between gods and men, individuals and groups, freedom and destiny. The strands of plot considered so far all turn upon abuse or violation of power: the Danes committed an original sacrilege from which flow Neptune's abuse of his divinity and the fathers' abuse of their vows and powers of deceit. Neptune sees these human abuses as equivalent to Cupid run amok among the virgins and at the same time implicates himself in what he condemns:

Do silly shepherds go about to deceive great Neptune, in putting on man's attire upon women, and Cupid, to make sport, deceive them all by using women's apparel upon a god? Then, Neptune, that hast taken sundry shapes to obtain love, stick not to practice some deceit to show thy deity, and having often thrust thyself into the shape of beasts to deceive men, be not coy to use the shape of a shepherd to show thyself a god. (2.2.17–24)

Neptune's brief reminiscence puts in question his present appetite for virgin sacrifice and his authority as a judge of Cupid: the human fathers and the godling adopt the same methods – deceit, disguise – Neptune has himself employed to passionate, illicit advantage and will now employ to show himself a god. This past the present Neptune must acknowledge and repudiate when he serves as umpire in the divine wrangle. Asking for Cupid's release and Diana's punishment, Venus reminds him: 'show thyself the same Neptune that I knew thee to be when thou wast a shepherd [as, of course, he is now], and let not Venus' words be vain in thy ears, since thine were imprinted in my heart' (5.3.63–6). Neptune compromises:

It were unfit that goddesses should strive, and it were unreasonable that I should not yield, and therefore, to please both, both attend. Diana I must honour, her virtue deserveth no less, but Venus I must love, I must confess so much. Diana,

restore Cupid to Venus, and I will forever release the sacrifice of virgins. If therefore you love your nymphs as she doth her son, or prefer not a private grudge before a common grief, answer what you will do. (5.3.67–74)

Giving up the sacrifice of virgins, Neptune restores order to the relation between man and god, forgiving the Danes' ancient crime and the fathers' modern one and therefore evaporating the need for human deceit to avert destiny. Abandoning a practice analogous to Cupid's pranks, Neptune restores the order of heaven as well as earth when he reconciles Diana with Venus even as he accepts both chastity and ('proper') love in himself. Phrased as a conflict between 'private grudge' and 'common grief', the goddesses' dispute has analogies in the human community, where Tityrus' and Melebeus' deceit puts the entire community at risk:

Consult with yourselves, not as fathers of children, but as favourers of your country. Let Neptune have his right if you will have your quiet . . . whoso hath the fairest daughter hath the greatest fortune, in losing one to save all . . . (4.1.13–18)

Since 'destiny' has so frequently been represented as amorous destiny (Cupid, Neptune, Venus), it is no surprise when one father is accused of incest (4.1.37ff.), but the more mysterious destiny belongs to Gallathea and Phyllida. Venus reverses Neptune's earlier persecution. Where he destroyed, she will create: 'Then shall it be seen that I can turn one of them to be a man, and that I will' (5.3.142–3). Lyly refuses to name which boy–girl–boy will be transformed, so we do not forget the significance of a love that does not need a commonplace 'cause of affection'; Gallathea and Phyllida accept their amorous destiny and their love, whether homosexual or heterosexual.

As the happy couple and their human and divine entourage head for the church door, Rafe, Robin, and Dick – the miller's sons – 'malpertly thrust themselves' (5.3.180) into the company and are amusingly welcomed as tellers of their fortunes 'these twelve months in the woods' (185–6) and singers at the wedding celebration. We have watched them pursue their fortunes from a scene where they fail to learn the rudiments of seamanship and then decide on adventures: 'Come, let us to the woods and see what fortune we may have before they be made ships' (1.4.69–71). Rafe meets an Alchemist – 'If he can do this [make gold], he shall be a god altogether' (2.3.42) – but, disillusioned, leaves him for an Astronomer, who promises 'Thy thoughts shall be metamorphosed, and made hail-fellows with the gods' (3.3.79–80). This career, too, having fallen in, Rafe meets Robin, who has been equally disappointed as an apprentice fortune-teller, although he has

learned 'I should live to see my father hanged and both my brothers beg. So the mill shall be mine, and I live by imagination still' (5.1.33-5). They depart together, seeking Dick who, it is reported, 'hath gotten a master that will teach him to make you both his younger brothers' (5.1.65-6), and the three next appear at the wedding of Gallathea and Phyllida. Despite the humorous satire on professed human learning, these episodes appear nearly incidental until we notice that they all involve various deceitful or deluded attempts to control destiny. The alchemist, astrologer, and fortune-teller fit this description more clearly for an Elizabethan audience than for a modern one; the Mariner tries to subdue the most violent destiny in the play, Neptune, the sea, who may speak for himself: 'destiny cannot be prevented by craft' (5.3.13-14). Dick's unseen master is even more interesting, for he is the human analogue of Venus and her proposed metamorphic powers. He offers a magical escape from every Elizabethan male's genetic and economic destiny: primogeniture.

Such an arrangement has been called 'analogous action'; to resolve the play's meaning, to perceive the relation of plot with plot or situation with situation, we are required to see them as analogies illustrating some overarching situation or argument: '*Gallathea*... is built... upon diverse situations employing a common formula, the attempt to defy divinity.'²⁹ Analysing allegory risks paraphrasing a universal into truism, but the 'formula' includes Lyly's emphasis on the movement from disorder to order through the sacrifice of selfish concerns and his differentiation between destructive, human or humanly inspired self-transformation and divine metamorphosis. So stated, the dramatic analogies make a claim that suits an ambitious and hence conservative court-playwright. Queen Elizabeth, before whom the play was performed, would endorse such politically pacific counsels, and she is unlikely to have missed, or disliked, her allegorical association with a variety of Olympian deities. (In George Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris*, also presented at court and also dating from the two-year period in which *Gallathea* must have been composed, Elizabeth is said to transcend Venus, Juno, Minerva, and Diana.)

Most multiple-plot plays depend upon analogy or analogy's twin, contrast. Lyly's dramaturgy refers the analogies to an allegorical, unstated, and static situation (in *Campaspe*) or, in *Gallathea*, to an allegorical, unstated, and dynamic argument. Less allegorical and less mythological plays represent the focus for their analogies or contrasts mimetically, and we are invited to

²⁹ Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly*, pp. 97 and 101; my interpretation is indebted to Saccio's.

make psychological, social, or political inferences rather than to formulate statements or arguments about abstract categories in the Lylyan manner. Among other things, this difference means that non-allegorical multiple-plot plays tend to be more immediately subversive and can lead to dangerous discoveries – rebellion is like common theft, but so is rule (e.g., *Henry IV, Part I*), or sexual passion is like mental illness, but so are patriarchal social structures (e.g., *The Changeling*).

While Lyly's plots at first sight seem out of step with the popular drama of the 1590s, later plays use similar plot structures. A common device explores varied examples within a single category of experience. Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* (1604), for instance, follows a series of paired lovers – the pattern Shakespeare uses in *As You Like It* (1599) and *Much Ado about Nothing* (c. 1600) – and traces the heterosexual dance by displaying the lovers' relations among themselves and with others: Franceschina (the title character) and her now bored lover, Freevill; Franceschina and Freevill's naïvely moralistic friend, Malheureux; Freevill and his 'betrothed dearest', Beatrice; Beatrice's trenchantly witty sister, Crispinella, and her 'blunt' Benedick-like lover, Tysefew. The pairs are related thematically – they exemplify 'varieties of love' – but their dramatic interaction gradually reveals both a value hierarchy and a satiric or moral criticism. The playwright's 'argument' and the audience's pleasure lie in the plot, the characters' relationships through time, rather than (as in *Gallathea*) at the more abstract level of an argument the play illustrates and refines. To show, among other things, the 'difference betwixt the love of a courtesan and a wife', Marston offers paired characters in unstable and changing relations rather than in a fixed but only gradually revealed equilibrium.³⁰ We are thus led to believe that each pair of lovers, and each lover within each pair, learns from his or her experience and from the experiences of the other lovers. As its appearance in Shakespeare's and Greene's romantic comedy suggests, this arrangement of thematically linked and distinguished characters probably derives from the numerous contrasting pairs of lovers who populate Renaissance pastoral poetry and pastoral drama. As he did with other bits and pieces of dramatic tradition and convention, Marston places the derivative comic structure into a decidedly tragicomic context by expanding the range of characters he examines and, again, does so by making that examination dynamic rather than static.³¹

³⁰ Marston's slightly misleading *Fabulae argumentum* ('argument of the play') reads: 'The difference betwixt the love of a courtesan and a wife is the full scope of the play, which, intermixed with the deceits of a witty city jester, fills up the comedy.'

³¹ For Marston's inventive appropriation of previous drama, see Lee Bliss's chapter, below, pp. 230–3.

At a slightly greater distance from Lyly's practice than Marston's variation lies the plot where paired characters function not thematically but narratively, and hence discursively in a different way. In *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608), George Chapman distributes common experience among several characters, almost 'doubles' the characters, and thus clarifies the play's intellectual dialectic and incorporates it into the dramatic architecture. Given the facts that Byron is a great soldier and a great traitor, Chapman develops La Fin and the Duc D'Aumale as, respectively, a soldier and a traitor. So much the playwright had from his historical sources. He enriches the pair of doubling characters through Byron's responses to them, or, more exactly, to the facts of their careers. In La Fin, Byron's heroic anger is reduced to petty resentment; in Aumale, Byron's future appears, though he mistakes its significance.

Aumale is the simpler, more poignant example. He first appears, an exile at the Archduke Albert's court, listening to a painful but sympathetic recounting of his treachery. Bellièvre, one of King Henry's ambassadors, expresses his sorrow that Aumale's 'obstinacy ... [in] ... mortal enmity against the King'

Should force his wrath to use the rites of treason
Upon the members of your senseless statue,
Your name and house, when he had lost your person,
Your love and duty. (1.2.57-60)

Aumale's dignified response, 'I use not much impatience nor complaint', seems to end the matter, and Byron chooses Aumale to illustrate his aphorism, 'The bounds of loyalty are made of glass, / Soon broke, but can in no date be repaired' (145-6). Chapman rarely manages to unite exposition with reflection so neatly, but in character-doubling he finds a method which yields 'binocular' vision of an event. The hero's puzzlement at one of the 'rites of treason' used against Aumale - 'And (for a strange reproach of his foul treason) / His trees about it [Aumale's razed house] cut off by their waists' (152-3) - illustrates his insensitivity. It is, after all, not a very difficult symbol, and hardly 'a strange reproach'. Pairing Aumale with Byron serves several important purposes: the dialogue with the man himself and Byron's reference to past events give the play temporal depth; we learn that traitors exist in France and that they are punished; Byron, it appears, does not entirely understand the significance of treason or its punishment.

La Fin, too, partly echoes Byron's situation: both are old soldiers, now unneeded. Berowne's remark, 'tis some policy / To have one show worse than the King's and his company' (*Love's Labour Lost*, 5.2.510-11), provides a model for La Fin's function. William Empson describes 'pseudo-parody to disarm criticism': two similar characters or characters sharing certain ideals

are distributed between an heroic and a pastoral plot.³² One character draws the audience's criticism, or disbelief, or laughter, leaving the other unscathed. It is 'pseudo'-parody because the heroic half of the pair is not in fact meant to be qualified by the 'pastoral' *alter ego*. That *alter ego* satisfies certain psychological needs in the audience and makes the naturalistic concession that, for example, cowards exist as well as heroes.

As a method of satisfying incredulous or hostile reactions, pseudo-parody suits a tragedy whose hero strains the common definition of humankind. Instead of flattening Byron's high aspirations to the trivia of La Fin's own goals and personality, his characterization accentuates Byron's unique qualities and makes us more sympathetic to the grand traitor. In part, Chapman distinguishes them through dramatizing La Fin's fear of Byron. The two men have radically different aims, and that difference, we assume, corresponds to an equal difference in their respective characters and virtues. We see, too, the antipodal difference in King Henry's treatment of the two men.

La Fin's role also recalls a traditional use of the foil: he represents aspects of Byron's character – anger, quick resentment at injury, a sense of discarded or ignorant merit – in debased form. Consequently, we transfer our horror at Byron's decay from the traitor himself to the tool of treason, a character similar to Byron in some skewed fashion. Unlike other Renaissance playwrights, Chapman does not pile up parallel, simultaneous examples of the hero's situation. When they are first introduced, neither La Fin nor Aumale mirrors Byron's situation in the same way that Laertes or Fortinbras does Hamlet's, or Gloucester Lear's, or Bajazeth Tamburlaine's. The essential difference is that La Fin and Aumale are not what Byron is, but what he may be.

Initially, Byron and La Fin appear similar because both are veteran warriors; their doubling implies they may become similar in other ways as well. In particular, Byron fears that what has happened to La Fin – exclusion from court despite a good war record – may also happen to him. La Fin says of Byron:

since he came from Flanders
He heard how I was threatened with the King,
And hath been much inquisitive to know
The truth of all, and seeks to speak with me.
(2.1.27–30)

The doubling device in both La Fin and Aumale provides proleptic versions of some future Byron. The play's opening thrusts us into the swirl of plot

³² See *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), chapter 2.

and counter-plot; Byron's interest in Aumale and La Fin and his ignorance of their full significance are clear. The trans-temporality of Byron's doubles – we have in effect time-lapse photographs of days in the life of Byron – distinguishes Chapman's technique from the foil characters of Shakespeare's or Marlowe's drama.

From the start, then, with Aumale and Byron at the Archduke's court and the conspirators' first moves against the hero, character-doubling accentuates the most important subjects in the play: Byron's past in war, his present in peace, and their dual link in time and memory, as embodied in King Henry's favour. The technique achieves complex meaning through trans-temporality, through the powerful presentation of possible events and futures, and, more simply, through explicit reference to past traitors and former men of war. Chapman goes beyond Marston by using a form of Lyly's dramaturgy as a narrative and discursive means to engage the audience in the plot rather than in a significant disposition of the characters.

An alternative method of organizing an action and emphasizing its intellectual coherences associates certain characters and certain values with specific dramatic locales. Romantic comedies use the pastoral dichotomy of country and court or country and city, and later urban comedies, even when they are confined to a single London street, frequently import a carefully defined group of characters, often landed gentry, from elsewhere. Tragedies by writers other than Shakespeare are less likely to employ such geographical pointers because multiple locales almost always require multiple plots, and multiple plots – perhaps in deference to classical practice and precept – are rarer in tragedy than in comedy. Yet, Middleton and Rowley's tragedy, *The Changeling*, vigorously exploits a two-place, two-plot structure, one of its several disconcerting similarities to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Scenes in *The Changeling* mostly alternate between a madhouse in Alicante and the famous and mighty fortress-palace that dominates the town. In both locales, female beauty and male lust lead men and women into 'madness', either (feigned) insanity or moral aberration; it becomes clear that society needs protection from its putative protectors, the asylum-keepers and the castle-dwellers.

Self-conscious dramaturgy and dramatic illusion

In the late 1580s and 1590s, playwrights increasingly employ various narrative, 'framing', or 'distancing' devices: prologues and epilogues, inductions, dumbshows, choruses, presenter or commentator figures, and frame narratives. These devices may serve quite prosaic craftsmanly purposes. They describe action that cannot be represented mimetically; they fill in details

(of character relationships or past events, for example) the playwright could not or did not wish to convey in other ways; they condense action. Thus, Skelton in Anthony Munday's *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* (*Robin Hood, Part I*) (1598) speaks for many contemporary playwrights: 'there are a many other things / That ask long time to tell them lineally, / But ten times longer will the action be' (2805–7). The devices themselves existed for a 'long time': some imitate classical drama (chorus, prologue), some extend back to the early Tudor period within the English secular dramatic tradition. Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton's *Gorboduc* (1562), canonized as the first 'regular' English tragedy (five acts, iambic pentameter), elaborately frames its action: each act begins with an allegorical dumbshow, and the chorus appears at the end of each of the first four acts to interpret the dumbshow and draw connections between it and the matters we have just seen and heard.

Extra-dramatic personages – intermediaries between fiction and audience – could be used more complexly than the chorus and dumbshows of *Gorboduc*. At the English secular drama's very start, Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece* (1497) opens with two memorable characters, 'A' and 'B', who emerge from a crowd of spectators. B explains to A the 'process', the plot, we are about to see performed. Eventually, A and B enter the fiction, respectively serving as pages to Lucrece's two suitors, and they close the play by arguing the merit of her choice of humble-but-virtuous Flaminus rather than the patrician Cornelius. Robert Greene employs virtually the same device almost a century later in *James IV* (c. 1591), where two characters from the frame play also enter a fiction (the principal drama) designed to demonstrate an abstract and satiric point. George Peele's *Old Wives Tale* (? 1590–4) takes a step towards Luigi Pirandello by showing us Madge, the old wife of the play's title, narrating a romantic story (a wizard, a kidnapped damsel, knights on quest) that very soon comes to life before the eyes of her stage and theatre audiences: 'Soft, Gammer, here some come to tell your tale for you' (129–30). Narration becomes enactment for the length of her story, and the drama ends with a return to the original setting and group of characters.

Technically sophisticated as Medwall's, Greene's, and especially Peele's dramaturgy appears, other playwrights used simpler dramatic devices to frame and introduce their plays. The apologetic Prologue to Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* (1599), for example, speaks for 'our muse'. She asks

That I may serve as chorus to her scenes;
 She begs your pardon, for she'll send me forth,
 Not when the laws of Poesy do call,
 But as the story needs. (20–3)

Dekker's Muse had reason to be concerned. Instead of appearing regularly, as the 'laws of Poesy' require, the chorus returns only twice (before Acts 2 and 4 in modern editions), each time instructing the audience to imagine major shifts of place and the passage of much time. Marlovian prologues are typically less ingratiating and less overtly informative. The Prologue to *Tamburlaine* spurns ordinary theatrical fare:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine

...

View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortunes as you please.
(1-4, 7-8)

Even when a Marlovian prologue-chorus does later return to comment upon the action, the speaker's initial appearance can be equivocal and challenging:

Not marching in the fields of Trasimene
Where Mars did mate [defeat] the warlike Carthagens,
Nor sporting in the dalliance of love
In courts of kings where state is overturned,
Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds
Intends our muse to vaunt his heavenly verse.
Only this, gentles: we must now perform
The form of Faustus' fortunes, good or bad.
(*Doctor Faustus*, Prologue, 1-8)

Prologue and chorus could merge more consistently into a 'presenter', an actor who set the scene at a play's opening and then returned at moments roughly corresponding with points a classically inclined audience might regard as act divisions, to comment on the action, predict the future, and generally serve as the audience's intermediary between theatre and fictional locale. Peele uses the device frequently in the 1590s and, as we have seen, John Skelton helps prepare the drama in Munday's two plays on Robert, Earl of Huntingdon (i.e., Robin Hood). Gower, the intricately anachronistic figure in *Pericles* (1608), is probably the best known such presenter.

At least from the 1560s, playwrights adapt the morality play Vice-figure to manipulate motivation and redirect action, and they consequently create a character who seems, like the presenter, half in and half outside the dramatic

action.³³ Such later-Tudor Vices as Ambidexter (*Cambises*) or Revenge (*Horestes*) continue the medieval drama's easy familiarity with the audience. Directly addressing the spectators or commenting 'aside' to them, these characters elide or obscure the differences between play and spectator. Dramatic convention and conventional morality kept the audience from a whole-hearted emotional or intellectual alliance with the Vice, however conspiratorial or confiding.³⁴ Under changed circumstances of both convention and morality, the same techniques could be employed to ally our sympathies with a tragic hero, or a comic rogue, or some more complex combination of qualities. Marlowe's Machiavelli (Italian devil and outsider) and Tamburlaine (Scythian rebel and outsider) are kindred to the peculiar species of commentator-malcontent hero or heroic criminal who swarms through later plays, especially Jacobean tragedy and tragicomedy. Violent malcontents like Bussy (*Bussy D'Ambois*) and violent and clever ones like Malevole (*The Malcontent*), Vindice (*The Revenger's Tragedy*), and Bosola (*The Duchess of Malfi*) prowl the peripheries of their plays condemning, spurning, and, too, gradually joining the characters and action from which they originally divorced themselves.

These characters mediate their represented worlds for the audience, and the increased psychological and dramatic self-consciousness of their plays is part of a wider phenomenon. When children's companies and the more intimate metropolitan indoor playing spaces are revived around 1600, the boys' acting strengths and the plays chosen to exploit those skills give an additional and sometimes strident fillip to dramatic performance as a self-conscious event. Ordinary audiences might now have a theatrical experience hitherto available only in plays prepared or specially adapted for court performance.³⁵ Typically, plays performed at court self-consciously acknowledge the unrepeatable occasion and the unique, royal spectator; away from court and at first especially among the children's companies, a related sense of theatrical occasion generates a knowing (for Marston, smirking; for Jonson, pugnacious) embrace of the dramatic performance as performance. At court, monarch-as-spectacle equalled or exceeded the play-as-theatre; in

³³ See my 'Early Shakespearian tragedy and its contemporary context: cause and emotion in *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, and *The Rape of Lucrece*' in Malcolm Bradbury and David Palmer, eds., *Shakespearian Tragedy*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 20 (London, 1984), pp. 97-128.

³⁴ For the Vice's relation with the audience and his importance to dramatic construction, see Peter Happé, "'The Vice' and the popular theatre, 1547-80" in A. Coleman and A. Hammond, eds., *Poetry and Drama 1570-1700* (London and New York, 1981), pp. 13-31.

³⁵ Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* and Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour*, for example, were printed with the extra text adapting them for court performance.

the private and public theatres, fashionable or would-be fashionable audiences also gathered to be seen as well as to see.³⁶ Exploiting this interaction, playwrights construct plays that openly represent themselves as things performed. Techniques of self-analysis, of characters withdrawing to comment upon their own represented behaviour as something itself enacted, are now integrated thematically.

Flameneo, in Webster's *The White Devil* (1612), is a good example of how the commentator or tool villain interacts with an increasingly self-conscious, 'rhetorized' dramatic representation.³⁷ The brilliant second scene displays Flameneo pandering his sister, Vittoria, to his master, Duke of Bracciano. As he dupes Vittoria's vain, suspicious husband, Camillo, Flameneo literalizes his status as go-between: he moves back and forth (or speaks louder and softer) between husband and wife in such a way that Camillo believes his brother-in-law heals their marital 'flaw' even as he argues Bracciano's case for adultery:

FLAMINEO . . . sister (my lord attends you in the banqueting-house), your husband is wondrous disconcerted.

VITTORIA I did nothing to displease him, I carved to him at supper-time –

FLAMINEO (You need not have carved him in faith, they say he is a capon already, – I must now seemingly fall out with you.) Shall a gentleman so well descended as Camillo (a lousy slave that within this twenty years rode with the black guard in the duke's carriage 'mongst spits and dripping pans) –

CAMILLO Now he begins to tickle her.

FLAMINEO An excellent scholar (one that hath a head fill'd with calves' brains without any sage in them), come crouching in the hams to you for a night's lodging?

...

CAMILLO He will make her know what is in me.

FLAMINEO (*aside to Vittoria*) Come, my lord attends you, thou shalt go to bed to my lord. (1.2.123ff.)

Rejecting his mother's angry moral intervention, 'What? because we are poor, / Shall we be vicious?' (314–15), Flameneo claims court service has so far made him 'More courteous, more lecherous by far, / But not a

³⁶ See Orgel, *Illusion of Power*, *passim*; Goldberg, *James I*, chapter 3; and Martin Butler's chapter, below, pp. 131–63.

³⁷ As it happens, *The White Devil* was originally and unsuccessfully produced at a public theatre; dramatic self-consciousness was not limited to the children's companies and their plays, although Flameneo has many cousins in the drama of Marston or Chapman, whose plays were performed by the children's companies.

suit the richer' and that only pandering leads to 'preferment'.³⁸ With a smug and knowing soliloquy reminiscent of Mosca's praise of the 'parasite' (*Volpone*, 3.1), Flamineo concludes the scene:

We are engaged to mischief and must on:
 As rivers to find out the ocean
 Flow with crook bendings beneath forced banks,
 Or as we, to aspire some mountain's top,
 The way ascends not straight, but imitates
 The subtle foldings of a winter's snake,
 So who knows policy and her true aspect,
 Shall find her ways winding and indirect.

(347–54)

Soliloquy and scene typify the dramaturgy of Webster's play, where numerous self-confident and self-complimenting 'politicians' – first, Flamineo and Bracciano; later, Monticelso and Francisco – spin murderous webs for guilty and innocent alike, and themselves later often fall victim to some more competent villain. Each episode, each scene, seems to be framed and viewed in a variety, often a sequence, of political, moral, emotional perspectives. Those perspectives are embodied in a figure or figures who have a fluctuating involvement in the immediate action, sometimes watching and overhearing, at other times participating actively. It is hard to resist seeing such scenes as the 'conscious' product of the characters' scene-making skills, their ability as dramatists within the drama. This italicization of experience has several consequences. Experience in *The White Devil* is self-conscious experience; forms of self-awareness are a subject of the play, and one Webster handles with high intellectual ambition. Theatrical metaphors are never far away, and the master of paradoxically over-confident criminality proves to be the master-manipulator, the manipulator of manipulators, the playwright himself. Further, when we see the play performed we are made self-consciously aware of the experience of experiencing the play. The degree of dramatic 'illusion' may vary, but it is never, and never finally, absolute. We – the audience – observe, overhear, contemplate our own experiences just as the characters do theirs.

Dramatic self-consciousness need not be only metaphorical or inferential. Numerous plays include dramatized preparations for, and often performances of, dumbshows, masques, and plays: *Hamlet*, of course, but also such diverse examples as Brome's *The Antipodes* (already quoted), Chapman's *The Widow's Tears*, Tourneur's (or Middleton's) *The Revenger's Tragedy*,

³⁸ 'Suit' is a good pun: both 'clothing' and 'application for advancement'.

Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, Webster's *The White Devil*, Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (which contains no fewer than three inset plays), and the numerical winner, Fletcher and Co.'s *Four Plays, or Moral Representations in One* (c. 1612), which presents four separate 'triumphs' or mini-dramas celebrating a dramatized royal wedding.³⁹ The local effects of inset dramas are varied; always they provide additional spectacle, and they may have become more common after the Middlesex General Sessions prohibited crowd-pleasing jigs in 1612.⁴⁰ (Hamlet indirectly labels 'The Mousetrap', the most famous play-within-a-play, a 'jig' by naming himself 'your only jig-maker', and 'jig' seems to mean 'play' in the second chorus of Greene's *James IV*.) 'A masque is treason's licence' (*The Revenger's Tragedy*, 5.1.181), and inset dramas frequently advance, or murderously conclude, the action; they fulfil in miniature many functions served more expansively by sub-plots. Commonly, when the audience witnesses the preparations for a masque or playlet, the subsequent dramaticule (Samuel Beckett's term) appears bracketed or in quotation marks, emphasizing its own theatrical existence, which might indeed be a theatre of the world or a theatre of God's judgements.

Even when plays lack a commenting malcontent or self-conscious villain, or when they lack inset dramatic or quasi-dramatic episodes, they often refer, directly and figuratively, to plays, players, and playing. Shakespeare's lines are, as always, the most familiar: Jaques brusquely dismisses Rosalind and Orlando, 'God buy you, and [if] you talk in blank verse' (*As You Like It*, 4.1.28–9); Fabian objects to the trick on Malvolio, 'If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction' (*Twelfth Night*, 3.4.121–3); Polonius recalls his role as Caesar (*Hamlet*, 3.2.100–1); Hermione complains that her unhappiness 'is more / Than history can pattern, though devised / And played to take spectators' (*The Winter's Tale*, 3.2.33–5), and a Gentleman proclaims the romance-reunion of Perdita and Leontes 'like an old tale still' (5.2.59), and so forth. But such remarks are everywhere, and from an early period. We have already heard Marston's Feliche claim 'Here might be made a rare scene of folly, if the plot could bear it', and about ten tears before, Kyd's *Revenge* advises the ghost of Don Andrea,

³⁹ *Five Plays in One* is known by its title only, although it may have been the same as the equally lost first part of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, where 'triumphs' or pageant-like shows of each sin could be expected. On this aspect of *The Roman Actor*, see Jonas Barish, 'Three Caroline "Defenses" of the stage' in Braunmuller and Bulman, eds., *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, pp. 194–212.

⁴⁰ See Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 181, where he interprets some lines in James Shirley's *The Changes* to this effect, and pp. 45–6 above.

'Here sit we down to see the mystery, / And serve for chorus in this tragedy' (*The Spanish Tragedy*, 1.1.89–90). When the eponymous hero of *Mucedorus* needs a disguise, Anselmo recostumes him as an actor in another play: he offers 'a cassock; / Though base the weed is, 'twas a shepherd's / Which I presented in Lord Julio's masque' (Scene 1), and Mouse makes a good joke in the next scene about the play's actor–bear: 'A bear? nay, sure it cannot be a bear, but some devil in a bear's doublet.'

Later than *The Spanish Tragedy* and *Mucedorus*, Henry Chettle's (or Anthony Munday's?) *The Tragedy of Hoffman* (c. 1602; probably revived in the late 1620s) produces a revenger who has rigged up a mini-theatre near his cave. What seems to be a small, curtained alcove initially contains the skeleton of his executed father, hung up in chains, but Hoffman soon adds the corpse of Otho:

Come, image of bare death, join side to side
With my long injured father's naked bones.
He was the prologue to a Tragedy
That, if my destinies deny me not,
Shall pass those of Thyestes, Tereus,
Jocasta or Duke Jason's jealous wife.
So shut our stage up: there is one act done
Ended in Otho's death. 'Twas somewhat single;
I'll fill the other fuller . . . (1.3.405–13)

Later, Hoffman orders a henchman, 'now or never play thy part; / This act [another murderous trick] is even our tragedy's best heart' (3.2.1341–2), a line anticipating Vindice's too quickly satisfied remark at an enemy's death, 'When the bad bleeds, then is the tragedy good' (*The Revenger's Tragedy*, 3.5.205).

While these and many other examples seem to anticipate the literary self-consciousness familiar in modern and post-modern works, these earlier references resonate in a different metaphorical system. Princes, preachers, and poets found themselves and all humanity playing roles in *theatrum mundi*, the theatre of the world, a faint but morally pregnant anticipation of eternal life where we will all see face to face, not through the dark glass – the mirror, reflection, or stage-play – of what St Paul calls 'imperfect knowledge' (I Corinthians 13.9–12). Samuel Beckett's references to 'underplot', 'soliloquy', 'a multitude in transports of joy' (i.e., the audience) in *Endgame* operate within the closed system of his play, all earlier plays, and our perception. Superficially similar references in Renaissance drama are both metaphorical and, for the Christian believer, compellingly literal.

The early modern English professional theatre was hardly ever a theatre of illusion, hardly ever a theatre manifesting the verisimilar reality of represented beings and events. Instead, it created an intellectual and emotional para-reality, a quick forge and working-house of thought, where disbelief was not suspended because verisimilar belief was not invoked.⁴¹ The many examples of 'self-conscious dramaturgy', moments when the play acknowledges its status as play or fiction, are not breakings of an illusion, but blunter statements of a continuously evident state of affairs and are usually ways a play draws attention not to itself but to the issues and sensations of self-consciousness or of playmaking. Tudor and Stuart plays treat dramatic illusion and self-conscious dramaturgy variously, and the most sophisticated examples exist alongside simple or tangential ones. Yet the two are always interconnected and almost always quite distinct from dramatic illusion as propounded on the realistic or naturalistic stage of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, unless the illusion lies in the (imagined) dramatic feats of a conjuror, a wizard, or some divine or supernatural being, or perhaps in certain stage effects such as blazing stars, comets, and the like.⁴² Instead, the audience is explicitly invited to collaborate in its dramatic experience, to create an illusion for itself.⁴³ This condition naturally means that the degree of imaginative involvement, the degree to which the audience 'really believes', will vary throughout the play; self-conscious remarks or episodes are obvious ways in which the dramatist may control, or at least influence, the audience's experience. Furthermore, it seems likely

⁴¹ See R. A. Foakes, 'Forms to his conceit: Shakespeare and the uses of stage-illusion', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 66 (1982 for 1980), 103–19.

⁴² See Graves, *Lighting the Shakespearean Stage*. Graves's very different interest corroborates the argument I make against 'illusionistic' staging: early modern dramatists brought real or real-appearing lighting instruments on stage not to increase illumination, although they had that effect, but to indicate darkness: 'Light paradoxically represented darkness and as such must be accounted not illusionistic' (p. 204). While the Renaissance theatre was generally unillusionistic, canons of verisimilitude were much less rigid than neo-classical or naturalistic ones: in Middleton's *Game at Chess* (1624), the Black Bishop represents the Conde Gondomar, until recently the Spanish ambassador, and the actor appeared on stage in the very litter Gondomar had used as he travelled about London; see my "'To the Globe I rowed": John Holles sees *A Game at Chess*', *ELR* 20 (1990), 340–56. The title-page of Thomas Scott's *The Second Part of Vox Populi* (1624) illustrates Gondomar's 'chair of ease' and the litter.

⁴³ Prologues and commendatory verses often emphasize the 'as if' quality of the audience's emotional involvement: they should 'Think ye see / The very persons of our noble story / As they were living' (Prologue, *Henry VIII*); they should feel 'A real passion by a counterfeit' (Thomas Stanley's prefatory poem to the Beaumont and Fletcher first folio, 1647). Pursuing almost the opposite point to mine, Richard Levin collects numerous such passages in 'The relation of external evidence to the allegorical and thematic interpretation of Shakespeare', *ShakS* 13 (1980), 1–29, esp. pp. 11–21.

that some of the audience all the time and all of the audience some of the time will be at Dr Johnson's extreme, 'always in their senses', always aware of the 'wooden O', the rain on the neck, the smell of tallow or latrine. Only Romantic and post-Romantic prejudice makes such a condition seem anti- or un-dramatic, and only neo-classical prejudice (Dr Johnson's own, in fact) sees such a condition as detrimental to dramatic pleasure, or indeed relevant to one's pleasure in plays at all.

Thomas Kyd's influential *Spanish Tragedy* shows how collaborative illusion and un-illusioning and renewed illusion might coexist in a stable and satisfying tension. Surrounded by his numerous victims, Hieronimo concludes his fatal playlet thus:

Haply you think, but bootless are your thoughts,
That is fabulously counterfeit,
And that we do as all tragedians do:
To die today, for fashioning our scene,
The death of Ajax, or some Roman peer,
And in a minute starting up again,
Revive to please tomorrow's audience.

(*The Spanish Tragedy*, 4.4.76–82)

Examples are best precepts.

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Texts

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3

MICHAEL HATTAWAY

Drama and society

The purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

(*Hamlet*, 3.1.20–4)

Literature and history

THESE familiar lines contain familiar metaphors. Hamlet is talking about acting, and it is not too difficult to appreciate the aptness of his prescription when considering a play in performance. Some acting *is* based on mimicry or 'mirroring' – the lines could be used to describe either the plain glass of theatrical 'realism' or the distorted glass of a satire. Unfortunately, however, to understand theatre fully we have to understand not only performance but what generates performance, the dramatic text. Mirror metaphors and the metaphors that derive from painting – dramatic 'portraits' and so on – can, it turns out, often be mystificatory when we attempt to describe the workings of a text, made not of pictorial images but of words. Even more unfortunately, these 'reflection' metaphors have been prevalent in the *criticism* of poetry and drama from classical times. This had the effect of making the writing of an essay like this on 'drama' and 'society' especially problematic.

It is obvious from these opening sentences that some discussion of theory must stand as a prologue to a consideration of our topic. My purpose in what follows, however, is not to threaten the reader with high-astounding abstractions but to generate a sense of method – a necessity because of the wide variety of evidence to be considered.

One possible avenue of approach might be through a study of the relationship between *theatre* and society, paying attention to audiences, the economics of playing and so on; a second would examine the relationship between dramatic literature and *ideas*. An analysis of *King Lear* using 'ideas' might lead us to see Edmond as an incarnation of a malignant 'nature'. An

alternative, *ideological*, analysis of the text would take into account the cultural forms and the social pressures of its time, and demonstrate how, for example, it could be held to be right for a 'natural son' to be dispossessed of a share in his father's land (see 1.2.16).

The task is to sift through certain primary and most complex evidence, dramatic texts, considered as far as is possible as designed for performance, and to test a consensus view: that in the theatres of the period could be played out contests between, on the one hand, the hegemonic interests of court and city and, on the other, oppositional – and sometimes subversive – readings of state affairs or proclamations of city vice. There is, in other words, evidence not only of cultural unity but of cultural division. The fact that players operated under the patronage of courtiers may not mean that the drama they presented embodied court values, although it is seldom that the institution of *monarchy* itself is criticized. (Specifically, as Martin Butler has shown [*Theatre and Crisis* 1632–1642], there was no continuous evolution from Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre to a 'cavalier' theatre serving an élite audience and the royalist cause.) Indeed from about the 1580s theatres took forward the cause of 'reform' at about the very moment that church reformers ceased to deploy godly plays, ballads, and images, and turned from iconoclasm to iconophobia.¹ Theatre is *re*-presentation: kings become 'subjects' – the monarchy and many other institutions become the subjects of the dramatists' probings.² In an age where literacy was limited, playwrights served some of the roles of modern journalists: *Swetnam the Woman Hater* (1617–18?), *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), and *A Game at Chess* (1624) are theatrical essays on contemporary issues (the last a sharp attack on royal policy), and *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1589) and *Richard II* (1595) were revived in response to particular events, the execution in 1594 of Dr Lopez, the Queen's physician and a Portuguese Jew who had been accused of attempting to poison his mistress, and the revolt of the Earl of Essex in 1601.

Perhaps, moreover, as a complement to the claim of Aristotle in the *Poetics* that literature is more universal than history, it is time to stress the *specificity* of the action of the plays of the English Renaissance. Their detail of reference and intricacy of plot generate scepticism or reveal a lack of correspondence between theological and moral ideals and political and social realities. As Brecht indicated, dramatic literature can be a reflection *on* experience and not just a reflection *of* it.

¹ See Patrick Collinson, *From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: The Cultural Impact of the Second English Reformation* (Reading, 1986).

² See David Scott Kastan, 'Proud majesty made a subject: Shakespeare and the spectacle of rule', *SQ* 37 (1986), 459–75.

What Shakespeare fails to mention in these lines from *Hamlet*, and what has been so much neglected, is language. Historically language has been ‘overlooked’, regarded as unproblematic. If earlier writers of criticism had a theory it was based on a ‘realistic’ model. ‘Common sense’ led to the assumption that the world exists in an unproblematic way and that language serves to ‘reflect’ or ‘mirror’ its reality. Meaning is a function of intentional reference to that world, whether this is held to be constituted of objects or states represented by ‘facts’. Accordingly – and misleadingly – texts were held to be transparent: we could ‘look through’ them, it was assumed, to ‘realities’ – or to the author. Early attempts at Marxist critiques of the drama, based on a deterministic relationship between material realities and authorial points of view, were equally oblivious to the functioning of language. No, it will be argued here, we must concentrate on the texts, their varieties of opacity, the ways they themselves function as historical evidence.

The work of recent generations of critics has demonstrated the way in which language is not just a function of reality but an instrument that itself serves to constitute that reality. It has been claimed that meaning derives not only from reference to the world but from differential relationships in a language system – arguments which have made it almost impossible for us to use the word ‘realist’ or its derivatives again. We have also, as a consequence, become self-conscious about a second critical metaphor: that of art as ‘expression’. Texts were long held to ‘express’ the point of view of the author who individually and uniquely created them, to be a simple function of the author’s intention. But now it is hard to believe that the author is the source of *all* meaning. Dramatic discourse is composed out of language that comes to the author deeply imprinted with ideology – some prefer to see the author composing his text out of a *number* of languages that work in dialogue with one another.³ Even if we do not fully accept this and do not believe that we are trapped in the prison-house of language, we are aware that a *dramatist’s* representation of the world is shaped not only by the cultural forms of, say, genre and characterization that he uses, but by the collective endeavours and material realities of the companies and theatres in which he worked – factors that derive as much from his social milieu as from any point of view which he may wish to ‘express’. Instead of looking, therefore, at the ‘signified’ of the text and the ‘historical realities’ to which it may relate, we must look at the *processes* of signification within the text. It is for this kind of reason that I have not worked my way in this essay through a series of chosen authors.

³ See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin, Tex., 1981).

The critical revolution which has led us to abandon the realist–expressive theory of language has affected not only our notions of art and literature but of history and society. ‘History’, we now realize, is as much ‘fiction’ as ‘truth’: many historians perforce arrange their accounts of events into narratives that can be analysed with the same tools we apply to what are obviously prose fictions, and historical personages become stylized characters not only in Renaissance chronicles but in Marx. No value-free, literal, or scientific historical narrative or account is possible – which is not to deny that there is a real material history with which these fictions might engage. The so-called ‘history plays’ of the period ought, as we have implied in this volume, to be redesignated ‘political plays’. They are no mere chronicles or reports upon the events of the reigns they portray but are dramatic essays on the institution of kingship and on the origins, nature, and transfer of power. So too ‘society’, what Hamlet calls ‘the body of the time’, is not, as the corporeal metaphor implies, a material reality but another species of fiction. Indeed, in our period ceremonies and rituals were widely used to create *perceptions* of society for the populace.⁴ Moreover, like Jonson’s Justice Overdo, ‘we hear with other men’s ears; we see with other men’s eyes’ (*Bartholomew Fair*, 2.1.29–30). When we try to describe the totality of a community, therefore, or to anatomize Hamlet’s body politic, we must remind ourselves that we are working not with ‘reality’ but with a model, a mental construct – what Hamlet calls a ‘form’. The nature of the model, as anthropologists have reminded themselves, will depend not only on ascertainable or measurable facts but on the ideological premises upon which we build it, the questions that we ask, the categories we construct.

When we turn again to the other side of our investigation, dramatic texts – without a time machine we can’t investigate performances – we have to remind ourselves that there are many ways of seeing. All we have are texts, and texts are often structured around debates, sometimes unresolved. The act of translation from text to performance, moreover, could well have been an act of transformation. (It may well be paradigmatic of the act of reading, for all reading is ‘reading into’.) That said, I would want to resist the claim of a social historian that literature belongs in a secondary category of the ‘imaginative’ as opposed to the documentary evidence with which he is familiar.⁵ Dramatic texts *do* offer a record, highly mediated, of the period’s perceptions of itself, sometimes of an event or series of events – even if this is only a performance or series of performances. We must have the confidence,

⁴ Kevin Sharpe, *Remapping Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 95–101.

⁵ J. A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England: A Social History, 1550–1760* (London, 1987), pp. 56–7.

therefore, to regard literature as 'in history', although we must be aware of the mediation. Conversely history (as an ideological determinant of *criticism*) is 'in literature': we must remember not only possible differences between text and realization but seek to examine and make explicit our own assumptions or premises, assumptions about the purpose of playing and the composition of the societies in little, the audiences that saw early performances, that affect not only our perception of society but our perceptions of the artistic genres constructed and deployed at any historical moment. As Stephen Orgel put it succinctly: '*The Tempest* is a text that looks different in different contexts.'⁶

This chapter attempts not only to relate drama to a complex period but to survey a span of almost a hundred years that concluded in what some historians have called 'the English Revolution'. There is no space for narrative, but what follows is predicated on the assumption that this was an age of radical change that ran roughly from what has been termed the 'Mid-Tudor Crisis' through to the Civil War. This said, we are ready to dislodge another misleading metaphor, again derived from the visual arts, the notion of historical 'background', not only unchanging but inert. Moreover, we must confront anew the problem, every time that we deal with a particular text, of whether to start from the 'history' or from the 'text'. 'History' is no mere 'background' and a 'text' is no mere reflector. Instead, we must learn to distinguish cultural forms and perhaps take our cue from Sir Philip Sidney, who spoke of literature as predominantly metaphorical, a 'figuring forth'⁷ – or from modern anthropologists. Stephen Greenblatt, whose work shows the influence of anthropology, argues that 'anthropological interpretation must address itself less to the mechanics of customs and institutions than to the *interpretive constructions* [emphasis added] the members of a society apply to their experiences'.⁸ Literary texts, in other words, provide evidence not necessarily of the realities of the period nor of the opinions of their authors but rather of the imaginative and ideological constructions, the *mentalités*, of a period. This chapter will therefore concentrate where possible on language – or discourse. Its premise is that the theatres often served the populace as instruments of demystification, laying bare, for example, the processes of signification that served to legitimate power as authority.⁹

⁶ Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. S. Orgel (Oxford, 1987), p. 11.

⁷ *An Apology for Poetry*, ed. G. Shepherd (Manchester, 1973), p. 101.

⁸ Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 4.

⁹ Jonathan Dollimore, 'Shakespeare, cultural materialism, and the new historicism' in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester, 1985), p. 6; see also Richard Tuck, 'Power and Authority in Seventeenth-Century England', *The Historical Journal* 17 (1974), 43–61.

But first, something about how historians are currently mapping the early modern period, and a demonstration of how, under the influence of recent theories of language and culture, critics are able to play their part in this revisionary endeavour.

The condition of England

From a modern point of view, England in our period was, compared with other European countries at the time, an orderly and well-governed society. To contemporaries, however, it did not feel like that. 'All coherence is gone', Donne famously proclaimed, Jonson used the transforming power of alchemy as the informing symbol of one of his comic masterpieces, and many more of his contemporaries felt that their world was changing fast: 'Is change strange? 'Tis not the fashion unless it alter: monarchs turn to beggars, beggars creep into the nests of princes, masters serve their prentices, ladies their serving-men, men turn to women' (Dekker and Middleton, 1 *Honest Whore*, [1604], 4.3.130–3). Here is a statement about social mobility which resonates out from a story of intrigue. 'Fashion', indeed, is a key word in this and many other plays of the age, and, conversely, certain dramatists resist the conventions of comedy which entail the reaccommodation of characters into an ideal order by the time the play ends.

Earlier cultural historians were not good at incorporating this dynamic into their accounts. The myth of Merry England, ruled not by a mortal woman but by Gloriana, was prevalent in the period and is celebrated notably, for example, by Dekker in his *Old Fortunatus* (1599). Dekker himself took his theatrical iconography from courtly dramatic entertainments, and this myth, it turns out, has informed not only introductions to Renaissance drama for school-children but far too many scholarly works. Working from 'the Elizabethan World Picture' – which is not a picture but a diagram derived from the desires of the Renaissance élite to legitimate inequality by calling it 'order' – a neat model of a static, stratified, hierarchical society was created, and it was assumed that most women and men were happy about their place in it.

The reality was different. 'Corresponding to nothing in the experience or speculative thought of the age, this creed of absolutism served chiefly to bolster up a precarious monarchy which lacked a standing army or an efficient police force.'¹⁰ Shakespeare's bumbling constables Dogberry and Elbow are no mere comic figures but indices of the limits of rule. In England,

¹⁰ Lever, *Tragedy of State*, p. 5.

moreover, there was no tradition of building up a 'middle class' to provide a stabilizing bureaucracy – offices were held through court patronage – and the interests of citizens and merchants were not always supportive of the court. Overall, rank and status were giving way to wealth and property. We may not wish to talk of a crisis of the aristocracy, but social change *had* diminished the prominence of the nobility while religious passions might well demolish hierarchy. The uneasy relationships between old nobility and hereditary titles on the one hand, and the newly enriched on the other, a subject Massinger made his own, was contributing to the crisis. In 1617 Fynes Moryson wrote, 'The gentlemen disdain traffic [trade], thinking it to debase gentry; but in Italy, with graver counsel, the very princes disdain not to be merchants by the great [in gross], and hardly leave the retailing commodity to men of inferior sort.'¹¹ Particular effects of this cultural division – the uproar caused by the sale of titles instituted by King James and the indebtedness of unthrifty noblemen and gentlemen to moneylenders, professionals, and merchants – are commonplaces in the drama. In *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) Jonson had offered lines based on the figure of metempsychosis which were to appear in Webster's *The Devil's Law-Case* (1616–19):

why look you,
Those lands that were the clients' are now become
The lawyers'; and those tenements that were
The country gentleman's, are now grown
To be his tailor's.

(*The Devil's Law-Case*, 2.1.163–7; cf.
The Devil is an Ass, 2.4.33–7)

The interpretive construction from 'nature', 'grown', is ironic, given that Webster is responding to cultural change and not natural evolution. The general point is that traditional models of society no longer matched actualities.

Political plays and comedies alike suggest, moreover, that rule and order might not extend into the 'alternative societies' of the tavern or the brothel-infested 'suburbs' of the capital, or, in theatrical texts, into the festive or 'green' worlds that lie at the heart of the carnivalesque experience. Princes might propose but the clowns disposed: Falstaff demonstrates that England will never be totally governable, as we can see from the way in which life continues in Gloucestershire (in 2 *Henry IV*), untroubled by affairs of state. The sumptuary laws, which laid down regulations compelling individuals

¹¹ *An Itinerary Written by F. Moryson, Gent.* (London, 1616), sig. Rrr2r.

to dress according to their degree, suggest an unsuccessful attempt to conserve a fast-changing social structure – and are generally referred to in the theatre with considerable irony.¹² One of the most famous lines of the age, Tamburlaine's 'Lie here, ye weeds that I disdain to wear' (1 *Tamburlaine*, 1.2.41), proclaims the hero's contempt for a world that would keep him as a shepherd. (Any play that used disguise could, in this context, be taken as subversive.) Plays that construct particular communities like *The Shoemakers' Holiday* (1599) reveal during the course of their representation the fissures in their social fabric, even if they end with an assertion of harmonious community.

The Life and Death of Jack Straw (c. 1593) opens with the killing of the collector of the King's 'task' or tax. Although the text seems to be revealing thereby the limits of a state which lacked an accepted means of raising revenue, the political significance of the riot – the age's customary mode of self-expression for the poor – is here dissolved by mingling clowns with the rioters. Modern historians of the period also stress the way that the reach of government exceeded its grasp, or offer titles that contain 'crisis'. A representative author, Derek Hirst, offers, in *Authority and Conflict*, an opening chapter which concentrates on inflation and unemployment as well as the problems of plague and famine – the latter disingenuously presented by a patrician as a 'natural' phenomenon in *Coriolanus* (1.1.96ff.).

Other factors led to instability of social formations. We could note first certain effects of the 'educational revolution'. There was a massive increase in the number of university-educated males for whom neither honour nor office was obviously available. (The difficulties of the younger or dispossessed sons of the wealthy figure in plays as different as *As You Like It* [1599–1600] and *The City Madam* [1632].) I mention this first, because this factor created a tribe of social critics who used the theatre as their pulpit – and the pulpit as their theatre. The 'university wits', and later John Marston, who was a member of the Middle Temple, provided the South Bank playhouses (situated across the river from the Inns of Court) and, later, the private houses with a diet of sardonic dramatic fare which reveals a deep scepticism about political and social forms (as well as about female virtue), and which seems to have been prepared for an audience of alienated male intellectuals. In *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614), Webster's 'malcontent' scholar Bosola has been described as 'neither villain nor hero, [a typification of] the plight of

¹² See, for example, *The Two Angry Women of Abington*, 2.1.848; see also Lisa Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters* (Brighton, 1983), pp. 146 and 154; see N. B. Harte, 'State control of dress and social change in pre-industrial England' in D. C. Coleman and A. H. John, eds., *Trade, Government, and Economy in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 1976), pp. 132–65.

the intellectual in the world of state, at once its agent and victim'.¹³ Middleton and Rowley's *The Old Law* (1618) is a fantasy about the desires of youth.

Another of the most notable features of the English population in the period was its geographical mobility – and this in a society that liked to think of itself as static. The stories of young people leaving home, which figure so often in the drama, derive not just from folk tale and romance. The court and law drew country gentry to the capital as did the market for labour: 2 per cent of the population migrated to London in each decade. The Jacobean city of night, that vision of an unstable metropolitan underworld that appears in the comedies of Middleton and others as a threat to the mercantile and industrious values of the capital, attracted the descriptive talents of pamphleteers and engaged dramatists like Jonson, who represented the phenomenon in texts as different as *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) and *The New Inn* (1629). Moreover, the violence of English public life, noted by diplomats and travellers, was recorded in the drama, and should not be written off as the natural content of theatre, a fictional form which depends upon conflict, or as mere pandering to popular desires for sensationalism.

The late age at which people from non-élite groups married in England (compared with continental Europe) also had its effects, creating a distinctive youth culture – witness the plays with prentice heroes. Women may often have attained more maturity than Shakespeare's fourteen-year-old Juliet manifests – although their work or the varieties of self-expression available to them are, as in any age, seldom represented. Plays by woman writers have entered the canon. Overall the dramatic texts may be taken to be as sceptical as they are supportive of the assumption that the virtue of a woman depended wholly on her chastity or fidelity – and of the double standard ('Tis a greater shame / For women to consent than men to ask')¹⁴ which condoned male promiscuity.

The increase in the population was accompanied by a rapid development of capitalist enterprise which was not matched by much change in the forms of organization of trade and industry. The rampant economic individualism of monopolizing merchants and grandee 'projectors' (like Jonson's Volpone) shouldered aside the collegiate ethos of producers and craftsmen, enshrined in the regulations of craft guilds and trade companies, and the feudal order and custom of the country were threatened by the energies of speculators like Sir Giles Mompesson, who appeared thinly disguised

¹³ Lever, *Tragedy of State*, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Swetnam the Woman Hater* (London, 1620), sig. D 3^v; see Keith Thomas, 'The double standard', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (1959), 195–216.

on the stage as Massinger's *Overreach* (*A New Way to Pay Old Debts* [1621–5]).

Divisions between rich and poor were increasing:

England is grown to such a pass of late,
That rich men triumph to see the poor beg at their gate.
(*The Life and Death of Jack Straw*, 1.1.78–9)

Probably as a consequence, crime was noted to be rising, provoking an alliance of ministry and magistracy which called for draconian punishments.¹⁵ It could even be that a minor character in *Measure for Measure* (1603), the Provost, is in fact a provost marshal (compare Jonson's *The Alchemist*, 1.1.170), indicating that 'Vienna' is being subjected to a régime invoked only in time of war. It was under the Tudors that executions were turned into theatrical set-pieces – and so they appear in plays like *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587) and *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1611). A play like *Measure for Measure*, on the other hand, seems very sceptical of any attempt to criminalize sin – as is, more indirectly, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, a play of the same year.

Yet it is often claimed that the eventual political upheaval of the Civil War did not result from social–economic upheaval but from politics and religion. Although the conditions of the poor deteriorated, social tensions did not become critical – mainly because of the achievement of the Elizabethan Poor Law. Theatrical performances must have been all the more provocative by virtue of the hard ideological questions they asked, even if they did not foster popular *revolution*:¹⁶ the poor generally appear as comic rather than deserving figures, and it is seldom that insurrectionary episodes are portrayed sympathetically.

It is indeed difficult to talk of 'class consciousness' in this pre-industrial age, although the popular drama may provide historians with evidence which they have tended to overlook.¹⁷ Certainly it is wrong to construct a model of political practice in which *parties* based on class or status interests appear. Early modern England was fought over by religious and political factions (often based on patronage groups) rather than parties. However, what Beaumont called 'the ordinary and over-worn trade of jesting at lords and

¹⁵ Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 159ff.

¹⁶ See Margot Heinemann's chapter, below, pp. 164–96, and Anat Feinberg, 'The representation of the poor in Elizabethan and Stuart drama', *Literature and History* 12 (1986), 152–63.

¹⁷ Compare Anthony Fletcher and J. Stevenson, *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985). They argue against the notion of a polarized society (pp. 1–15).

courtiers and citizens' (Prologue to *The Woman Hater*, 1607) does suggest that the theatres of the time were important instruments in fomenting populist sentiments.

The ideology that sustained authority was based on versions of patriarchalism. King James told the first English parliament convened after his succession, 'I am the husband, and the whole isle is my lawful wife; I am the head, and it is my body; I am the shepherd, and it is my flock.'¹⁸ This meant that political authority could be legitimated by reference to the authority of the father – and vice versa. Many plays are concerned with the problem of patriarchal authority in household and state alike – tragedies like *The Duchess of Malfi*, 'histories' like *Henry IV*, and comedies like *The Shoemaker's Holiday* – and others with the related phenomenon of masterless men (see, for example, Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* and Fletcher and Massinger's *The Beggar's Bush*).

The court

Bearing in mind Greenblatt's suggestion that we consider not just the structure and workings of institutions but 'the interpretive constructions members of a society apply to their experiences', let us consider three institutions, the court, the city, and the family. Dramatists acted as intelligencers to the nation, portraying not only hereditary monarchies like that of England but republics and elective monarchies like that of Denmark in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. They not only saw through the cult of monarchical magnificence and the veneers created for the purposes of performance and patronage to the realities of the private behaviour of courtiers – especially their sexual behaviour – but also subjected the whole institution of the court to a more radical critique. If the 'political nation' by and large accepted royal authority, dramatists in plays like, for example, Beaumont's *The Woman Hater*, seem to have wanted to expose the conspicuous consumption and conspicuous display of courtiers, their 'ten pound suppers' and their rich attire costing a 'lord's revenue', and to anatomize the ambivalence of the court, the problems that derived from its functioning as a dual fountainhead, of rule and of justice. Jonson, Marston, and Chapman were all prosecuted in various ways for their 'seditious and slanderous' presentations of court life. (Conversely, the quaint visions of court corruption that inform the plays of Tourneur and Webster were turned into a kind of documentary: when the Earl and

¹⁸ King James I, *The King's Majesty's Speech: as it was delivered . . . in Parliament . . . on Monday the 19 day of March, 1603* (London, 1604). Sig. B1^r; see also Hirst, *Authority and Conflict*, p. 50; Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500–1800* (New Haven, Conn., 1995).

Countess of Somerset were tried for the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury in 1615 contemporary reports of the affair made it seem as though life was imitating art.)

St Paul had written 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God, and the powers that be are ordained of God' (Romans, 13.1 [Geneva version]). This premise informs early notions of the 'state'. In the later Middle Ages the word can mean the condition of things, a divinely sanctioned order. In social terms – the word 'state' is related to 'estate' – it can mean high rank: 'Can you not be content with state and rule, / But you must come to take away my crown', says the king to some dissident nobles in a play published in 1620, *Swetnam the Woman Hater* (1.1.39–40). By the early seventeenth century the word had also achieved one of its modern meanings, an autonomous political structure open to analysis and change. 'States [are] great engines [that] move slowly', wrote Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* (II.xxiii.1): the mechanistic metaphor will supplant the older metaphors like 'body politic' or 'commonweal[th]' that figure, say, in the discourse of the lower orders in Shakespeare. Hamlet's metaphor 'something is rotten in the state of Denmark' (1.4.90) shows the word poised precariously between the first and third of these meanings. (There are similar ideological resonances in the opening soliloquy of Bussy D'Ambois, written a couple of years later:

Fortune, not Reason, rules the state of things,
Reward goes backward, Honour on his head;
Who is not poor, is monstrous; only Need
Gives form and worth to every human seed.
Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*, 1.1.1–4)

In England, the state, power, and the administrative machine were, as Hamlet implies, centred around the court, and dramatists took as much care in establishing the nature of the political milieux within which their protagonists operated as they did in creating personalities for them. Revenge tragedies – *The Spanish Tragedy* or *Hamlet* – implicitly demonstrate that political realities do not match theological ideals. The opening lines of Webster's *The White Devil* (1612) reveal the contradiction:

LODOVICO Banished?
ANTONIO It grieved me much to hear the sentence.
LODOVICO Ha, ha, O Democritus thy gods
 That govern the whole world! Courtly reward,
 And punishment. (1.1.1–3)

As Lodovico implies, courts have in fact two functions, which are irreconcilable: insofar as they are centres of patronage the courts of princes offer reward, insofar as they are courts of law they must administer punishment. The popularity of revenge plays derived not only from their exciting stories and the opportunities they offered for the construction of psychologically interesting characters, but from the political charge they delivered: how was an individual to find justice if the fountainhead of justice was itself polluted?¹⁹

Courts of princes provided a metaphor for the relationships between those in love. Male lovers professed themselves 'servants' to their 'mistresses', particularly in the plays and masques of the Caroline period that celebrated platonic love (which could be a figure for political allegiance). These interpretive metaphors draw attention to themselves by their tendentiousness, but may derive from a changing perception of the roles of husbands and wives – or simply be an inversion of realities.

In *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe had begun an anatomy of a world where the hero's 'complete armour and curtle-axe' are emblems of the reality of his power. In *The Jew of Malta* he sets the action on an island which serves as a demonstration of the way that the 'state' is coterminous with the court. The play contains an outsize hero, a theatrical descendant of the Vices of medieval drama, who dies as part of a stage emblem that recalls medieval illustrations of the torments of the damned. The play is, therefore, a tragedy; but T. S. Eliot's categorization of it as a 'tragic farce'²⁰ may serve to alert us to the fact that it is concerned not simply with the fate of an individual but with the world in which he works. Like the Vices in earlier plays, Barabas is brought into being by the Christians who surround him. The play is overtly theatrical: it is full of asides, and the players are called upon to convey to the audience the delight that derives from the energy of their roles. This very theatricality, however, serves to offer an insight into the nature of power in Malta.

Now much of the action, it turns out, involves political transactions, and not just intrigue and revenge. Ferneze, Governor of Malta, holds his title from the Turk, to whom he should pay tribute. That has not been collected for ten years, giving Ferneze the semblance of absolute power, although the appearance of Calymath's Bashaws makes it apparent to the audience that power derives not from God but from a mightier man. As in England at the time, there is no agreed method of raising taxes: the finance of the state is not separate from the liquidity of the prince. Moreover, power depends upon commodity, the wealth of the Jews, which can be seized and used to

¹⁹ See Michael Hattaway, *Hamlet: The Critics Debate* (London, 1987), pp. 81ff.

²⁰ *Selected Essays* (London, 1951), p. 123.

buy off the Turks, and profit derives from not from industry but colonial adventuring and policy. The Jews may have no place in the political life of the island, but the island depends upon the trade they generate.

Barabas's energy and wit, his 'bravest policy' (3.3.12), please an audience. It has been conventional to label the hero a stage Machiavel, a bogey figure of evil who casts aside all the moral imperatives of his age. That figure is conjured by the sequence in which Barabas and Ithamore vie with one another in their accounts of the evil deeds they have perpetrated (2.3), but the audience is aware not simply that Barabas may be essentially evil but also that he is an opportunist (see 5.2.44–5). He is a true Machiavellian: his power, it seems, derives from improvisation, observing the moment and energetically seizing the occasion. As Barabas himself says, policy begets authority (see 5.2.27–8). Moreover, there is little to distinguish Barabas in this respect from the Christians or Turks in the play. The isle is full of 'Jews' – a point made economically in a Royal Shakespeare production (Swan Theatre, 1987) where one actor doubled Machiavel with Ferneze. And it is only by a supreme act of 'policy', betraying both Calymath and Barabas, that Ferneze acquires the power he had desired from the beginning of the action.

The city

The rapid increase in the population – from 120,000 in 1550 to 375,000 by 1650 – and in the wealth of London provoked a strenuous re-examination of the ambivalent metaphor of the city, site of magnificence and freedom on the one hand and poverty and depravity on the other. Volpone's opening speech, which begins, 'Good morning to the day; and next my gold', heralds the brave new world of the city plutocrat. The speech is a kind of black mass, a blasphemous violation of a 'natural' order, demonstrating that money is not only the root of all evil but of all power. It begins a play which celebrates the opportunism, wit, energy, and sexiness associated with the reign of Mammon, but also a world where the ubiquitous pursuit of wealth means that characters are reduced to two kinds, knaves and fools, predators and prey. As a consequence the traditional assertions of comedy, love and justice, are transmuted to lust and revenge. However, the anti-acquisitive ethos adopted from older morality plays by Jonson and those who followed his lead in writing city comedies in the early years of the seventeenth century was not the only reaction to the expanding wealth of the metropolis. (This was indeed a fiction, given that Jonson's own patrons were maintaining their courtly life-style by monopolies, patents, and trading in offices.) Playhouses frequented by citizens had commissioned chronicle plays celebrating the glories of the city, its guilds, and the splendour and bounty of its heroes like

Sir Thomas Gresham; these plays are satirized in Beaumont's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607). Merchants became romantic heroes, metaphorically 'venturers', their argosies sailing home richly freighted with commodities from the Mediterranean and the Americas – these risk-takers have parasites as their anti-types. Once merchants could be knighted, the city developed its own gradations of rank: as Luke remarks in *The City Madam*:

It [is] for the city's honour that
There should be a distinction between
The wife of a patrician and plebeian.

(4.4.79–81)

Wealth-producing industry, however, is – as is usual in most periods – not represented: we seldom if ever see workers labouring at their vocation. Dramatists who, like Jonson, associated themselves with the court produced a string of anti-bourgeois comedies, in which clever aristocrats outwit citizens, a reflection of the way 'the gentry scorn the city'.²¹ (In *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* the rebellion ends when the Lord Mayor acts as champion of the king and slays the arch-rebel Jack Straw – an idealization of the loyalty of the city. It may be for this reason too that the city employed rival dramatists like Dekker to write legend-enacting pageants for the civic rituals which were so important in establishing London's self-identity.) Accordingly we must not look for a modern radical anti-capitalist ethos in plays of this kind: the action is seen from the point of view not of the labouring poor but of the court. Although the consequences for the poor of the rapacity of the engrossing farmer Sordido are exposed in the first act of *Every Man Out of his Humour* (1599), Jonson suggests that such a type is generally pilloried not because he 'is a villain, a wolf i'the commonwealth, but as he is rich and fortunate' (1.3.163–4). Aristocrat and citizen, however, did unite in exalting producers and craftsmen over merchants, monopolists, 'projectors', and speculators. Simon Eyre, hero of *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, is both maker and seller, craftsman and shopkeeper, whereas Jonson's Volpone and Subtle the Alchemist are speculators attempting to make wealth out of nothing. Eyre, by means of a shady transaction, amasses enough capital to rebuild the Leadenhall Market [21.130–4]: that fact is suppressed in favour of a celebration of his benefaction.

The newness of the metropolitan phenomenon seems to have provoked the dramatists to invoke old-fashioned dramatic terms. From about the end of the sixteenth century devils appear not, as in *Doctor Faustus* (1588–92),

²¹ *The Devil is an Ass*, 3.1.31. It is not the case, however, that the nobility lacked economic acumen – see Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, pp. 156ff. In *Westward Ho* and *Northward Ho*, however, the citizens dupe the gallants.

as tempters of a great man's soul, but as metaphors for the uncontrollable forces of the city economy. Jonson registers the resort to archaism by having Pug, the hero of *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), conjure Vices who speak in fourteens, a metre not used on the English stage for decades. The language of moral theology is widely applied to social transactions and social types, as in Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605), where the usurer Dampit (i.e. 'Hell') occupies the moral centre of the play's portrayal of covetousness. As Jonson's Pug remarks:

Can any fiend
Boast of a better Vice than here, by nature
And art, they're owners of. (2.2.7–9)

The old vice of covetousness seemed so obviously manifest and focused in city activity that Massinger, some fifteen or twenty years after the appearance of Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, sharpened up his satire by adapting its plot and moral schema in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* to expose the machinations of a *country* land owner, Sir Giles Overreach, who was as successful in amassing land as his dramatic predecessors were in amassing gold. However, no matter how wealthy Sir Giles became, status eluded him. Only by marrying his daughter into the landed class could he make a show at court: the plot of the play, of course, denies him this satisfaction.

The continuing political and economic dominance of the court and the city, therefore, may explain why the country is seldom if ever represented directly. (This may be equally due to the fact that for the most part the players catered to metropolitan audiences.) The country is generally a fictive place of resort, a festive, green or comic world to which characters migrate while in some confusion and from which they return to city having achieved a degree of recognition. Alternatively it is allegorized: pastoral plays and the pastoralized Gypsies who appear in dramatic entertainments of the Caroline period have all to do with court life and nothing to do with true rusticity.

Women and families

What can we say about the condition of women in Renaissance England? Rather than starting from 'history' or text, we might start from an 'interpretive construction', the proverb 'England is the paradise of women, the hell of horses, and the purgatory of servants.'²² This would seem to imply

²² This is the form given by M. P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1950), E147 – it is cited in 2 *Honest Whore*, 4.1.168–9, and discussed by Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 134n.

that England was basically a patriarchal society in which the popular view was that too many women were on top. However, while citing proverbs, we might remind ourselves of another: 'It is better to be a shrew than a sheep' (Tilley, s412), which reminds us of the manner in which similar social phenomena might be read in different ways. The proverbs taken together point to a problematic relationship between power and sex, in which female 'liberty' was seen as a threat to the whole social order. Local court records between about 1560 and 1640 'disclose an intense preoccupation with women who are a visible threat to the patriarchal system'.²³ The productive work that women might do (like that done by men) tended not to be portrayed in the drama, and the only available indices of female virtue were modesty, sexual chastity, and wifely constancy. Conversely any admission of the extent of patriarchal power must be censored. After publishing an anti-feminist tract, *Misogynos* (the title figure from *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*) proclaims:

How my books took effect! How greedily
The credulous people swallowed down my hooks;
How rife debate sprang betwixt man and wife!
The little infant that could hardly speak
Would call his mother whore. O, it was rare!
(sig. A4v)

Woman-haters in fact provided a comic type. They duly received their come-uppance – perhaps in deference to the women in the audience – after revealing how, in some instances at least, their misogyny stemmed from fear of feminine sexuality:

Let not your furious rod that must afflict me
Be that imperfect piece of nature
That art makes up, woman, unsatiate woman.
(Beaumont, *The Woman Hater*, 3.1.6–8)²⁴

The perception encoded in the first proverb quoted above may have been generated by economic realities. The military origins of land laws and the derivation of titles from chivalric orders certainly combined to disadvantage women, although laws governing dowries allowed married women a degree of economic control. All women, however – and their rights – were legally

²³ D. E. Underdown, 'The taming of the scold' in Fletcher and Stevenson, *Order and Disorder*, pp. 116–36.

²⁴ For what is virtually a dramatic monologue on woman ('an unfinished creature, delivered hastily to the world before Nature had set that seal which should have made them perfect') spoken by a page boy, see Chapman's *All Fools* (1604), 3.1.159ff.



12 A skimmington (from *Halfe a Dozen Good Wives: All for a Penny* [London, 1635?])

defined in terms of their marital status, that is, their participation in the common law was mediated through men. Women of the middling sort did, of course, play a central role in the control of a domestic *economy* which involved, unlike today's, many elements of production as well as consumption. This notwithstanding, 'the subordination of women was intensive, and did not only stem from the landed concerns of the gentry. "Skimmington rides", popular charivaris or shaming rituals directed at households where the wife ruled the roost, occurred over a wide area of England (see Plate 12). Still more harsh was the lot of poor and ugly women: eccentric behaviour could earn for these an accusation of witchcraft.'²⁵

The fact that the political nation was not overtly divided until late in our period should not encourage us to overlook stress and division within communities and families. Historical demography has exploded two myths which probably derive from literature: first, that marriage took place at an early age (the early marriage of Shakespeare's Juliet was quite abnormal), and, second, that the normal pattern of living in England was based on the 'extended' rather than the nuclear family. This meant that there was a comparatively long period between puberty and marriage, and that bonds between parents and children who had become adults were likely to come under strain – as they do in most of Shakespeare's comedies. There is, in addition, a series of plays with titles which proclaim their investigation into the unaccommodated members of untypical or unhappy households or communities: *The*

²⁵ Hirst, *Authority and Conflict*, pp. 17–18.

Gentleman Usher (1602), *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (1606), *The Roaring Girl* (c. 1608), *The Widow* (1615–17), *The Changeling* (1622), *The Elder Brother* (1625?), *The Guardian* (1633).

Questions of family history must be related to particular social milieux. Plays about women and the family have all too often been relegated to a sub-genre of ‘domestic drama’. The category is unfortunate, as it diverts attention from the organization of the household on to personality. Moreover, plays like the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (before 1592), Henry Porter’s *The Two Angry Women of Abington* (before 1599), and Dekker, Ford, and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), are, as their titles hint, as much concerned with community stresses as with individual happiness. Faversham, Abington, and Edmonton are scarcely static and idyllic villages out of a pre-industrial Merry England. Indeed, the protagonists in these first two plays are not simply members of the poor, deserving or undeserving, but are pillars of their societies. The action portrays the ways in which marriage and what is called ‘neighbour amity’ (*Abington*, I.I.5) are threatened by sexual desire, and the ways in which patriarchal plans for the disposal of property are subverted by feminine will. This is not just the stuff of comic theatre:²⁶ examination of the records of church courts reveals a large and rising number of defamation and slander cases which reveal the tensions that afflicted real places in ‘merry England’ – one in seven of the population was denounced for various kinds of sexual deviance.²⁷ Merry England indeed! From this perspective these plays become not prurient or sensationalist but crusading documentaries. (*Measure for Measure* and *The Duchess of Malfi* may be read as questioning the right of princes to concern themselves with matters of private sexual conduct, *Bartholomew Fair* as a demonstration of the inability of justice to put down ‘enormity’.)

The language of *The Two Angry Women* is riddled with bawdy, suggesting a breakdown not only of linguistic but of social decorum. The collapse of neighbourliness in Abington is attributed to wayward women – as always, articulate and angry females are demonized as ‘curst’ – and the play is resolved, unsatisfactorily, by the good offices of the local gentry and a wise son, but not before the flying matches, ignited by sexual suspicion, between

²⁶ The Red Bull comedy *Swetnam the Woman-bater* (c. 1618), the title of which would seem to suggest that it addresses itself to social issues, turns out simply to run through variations on stereotypical images of women.

²⁷ Hirst, *Authority and Conflict*, p. 49; see also J. A. Sharpe, *Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York*, Borthwick Papers no. 58, n.d.; Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1987).

Mistress Barnes and Mistress Goursey have revealed the tensions that can beset bourgeois marriage – and not before the former's daughter, Mall, has spoken up loud and clear for her right to dispose of her maidenhead when and to whom she pleases.

Social tensions overlies sexual tensions in most of these plays: Arden of Faversham opens the play that bears his name by complaining not only that his wife seems to be betraying him, 'a gentleman of blood' (1.1.36), but that her lover is a mere steward, a social upstart who has risen from a 'botcher' (a tailor who does repairs). Although Arden is ruthlessly murdered by his wife and her lover, he loses some of our sympathy as it is revealed how he is prepared to evict tenants who held land that has recently come into his hands: the play is as much concerned with property as with passion, and it is impossible to deduce from the text whether Arden is murdered for his rapacity under the eye of a benign providence or whether the audience is expected to attend to the cold-blooded resolution of his adulterous wife. Much of the action is filled with the comic incompetencies of the villains hired to do the murder, a device that suggests the unpredictability of a comic world rent by contrarities. The would-be murderers speak in heroic Senecan while inhabiting a world of farce. Similarly the sub-plot of *A Woman Killed with Kindness* seems to suggest a choleric society in which friendships as well as marriages are easily disturbed by passion.

As for the making of marriages and patterns of betrothal, it is difficult to know whether the predominant endorsement of romantic love in the drama is a reflection of a society in which parents – at least those below the rank of gentry – were gradually coming to allow their children more independence in their choice of marriage partners, or a reflection on a society in which parents arranged their children's marriages for them primarily for economic reasons. For most families, as in most plays, it was doubtless a problem never simply resolved.

As one way into this mass of material, I intend to examine three so-called deviant figures: a shrew, a witch, and a whore.

The assertion that women were little better than chattels, to be bestowed or acquired by men, is to be found in the drama, although seldom with such directness as we hear when Petruchio describes the status of his wife in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593?):

I will be master of what is mine own.
 She is my goods, my chattels, she is my house,
 My household stuff, my field, my barn,
 My horse, my ox, my ass, my anything.

(3.2.229–32)

The lines are in fact an adaptation of the tenth commandment (Exodus, 20.17): a modern audience is likely to find them outrageous – but there is no reason to doubt that certain contemporaries may have reacted in the same way hearing them spoken on the stage, wrenched out from their familiar context so that the interpretive metaphors are exposed for what they imply. How, then, might we relate a play like *The Taming of the Shrew* to the forms and pressures of its time?

Various readings present themselves: one would write the play off as insignificant farce derived from folklore, another would start from Kate's final speech which recommends wifely submission and conclude that the heroine has finally accepted her role and that of the majority of women in the period; a third would suggest that this conclusion turns the direction of the play with a simple and bold ironic statement – the text is open to subversion in performance; a fourth would see it as a 'condition of women' play, and seek to relate the action to economic realities and institutions.

In fact there can be *no* authoritative reading, and certainly we cannot identify an authoritative reading by invoking an original – there is simply no evidence outside the play (save possibly *The Taming of A Shrew*, generally considered to be a text that derives from memorial reconstruction by actors) to indicate how it was perceived in the theatre by its Renaissance audiences. Nor is there any internal evidence: we do not know when or if parts of the text – notably Kate's final speech – were realized ironically in performance. As Lisa Jardine says, there is 'no locating tone'.²⁸

Although the play is the only one attributed to Shakespeare to have an induction – a device which serves to establish the mode of play – the dramatic narrative is embedded in a frame which is only half complete. *A Shrew*, on the other hand, gives us a final scene in which Sly is borne in wearing his own apparel again and protesting, in the manner of Bottom, that he has had 'the bravest dream' in which he learned how to 'tame a shrew'. Both plays, this implies, are masculine fantasies.

We can get at the matter another way, through structure. The content of the play employs inversion – Petruchio's therapy (3.1.170–80) seems to reproduce elements of ritual misrule, and the 'shrewishness' of the fair-seeming Bianca stands as an anti-type of acceptable female behaviour. Petruchio could have had recourse to 'cucking-stool' or scold's bridle to tame his unruly partner. Instead he deploys a shaming ritual. His behaviour is like that of a 'skimmington', these curious combinations of festivity and punishment provoked by deviant behaviour. In the account of one in Calne in Wiltshire in 1618 we read of:

²⁸ Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, p. 59.

a man riding upon a horse, having a white night cap upon his head, two shoeing horns hanging by his ears, a counterfeit beard upon his chin made of a deer's tail, a smock upon the top of his garments; and he rode upon a red horse with a pair of pots under him, and in them some quantity of brewing grains, which he used to cast upon the press of people.²⁹

This is very like the description of Petruchio's arrival at his wedding day (3.2.40ff.). Agnes Mills, who made the deposition that contains this description, was 'dragged out of the house, thrown into a wet hole, trampled, beaten, and covered with mud and filth'. It's all redolent of the misery to which we are told in 4.1.55ff. Kate was submitted. This would suggest that Petruchio espouses the dominant ideology of his society and uses a typically male form of shaming Kate into submission.

What this implies is that Kate is represented as the inverse of qualities respected in women. (It has been also argued that witches are figures from an upside-down world.³⁰) Misrule necessarily invokes the rule it parodies. But Natalie Zemon Davis has suggested 'that charivaris sometimes involved an element of rejoicing at, even encouragement of, female insurrection . . . It is probably true that these demonstrations reflected an awareness that women could never be dominated to the degree implied in the patriarchal ideal.'³¹ Petruchio's behaviour seems outrageous and the text generates sympathy if not approval for Kate. These suggestive analogues to this one episode still do not, however, locate a tone in the text as a whole.

The induction not only says something about the mode of the text but announces *themes* which establish a social context – and a critique of social order. These include hunting, conspicuous display, social displacement by Ovidian metamorphosis which ironically materializes the Petrarchan commonplaces, and transvestism. We cannot tell 'who is speaking' when the boy player takes the role of the *belle dame de merci*:

²⁹ Quoted by Martin Ingram, 'Ridings, rough music, and the "reform of popular culture" in early modern England', *Past and Present* 105 (1984), 79–113.

³⁰ Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, misrule, and the meaning of witchcraft', *Past and Present* 87 (1980), 98–127.

³¹ Ingram, 'Ridings', summarizing N. Z. Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, Calif., 1975), p. 140. Other feminist approaches could be noted here: Coppélia Kahn's *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* (Berkeley, Calif., 1981) offers a psychoanalytical approach. Marilyn French's *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (London, 1982) speaks of polarized essentialist cultural values: creating and killing associated with women and men respectively. These are reviewed by Kate McLuskie, 'The patriarchal bard' in Dollimore and Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare*, pp. 88–106. A deconstructionist reading is to be found in Joel Fineman, 'The turn of the shrew' in Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman, *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (London, 1985).

SLY

Where is my wife?

BARTHOLOMEW Here, noble lord, what is thy will with *her*.

The themes are made problematic by this linguistic device of defamiliarization: the player refers to his fictive self as 'her' not 'me'. All of these elements invoke, by opposites, a 'puritan' ideal of marriage which, it has been argued, served to alleviate the lot of wives at the time. Although 'Puritanism was scarcely an ideology of women's liberation, and in the long run its mainstream varieties reinforced rather than weakened patriarchal authority... puritan teaching always stressed the partnership aspect of marriage, and gave the wife a responsible role in the moral ordering of the household.'³² Against this Lisa Jardine, whose account of the position of women rejects a simple explanation in favour of an investigation of wider economic realities, demonstrates that if companionate marriage was coming more into its own, little sign is visible of real dialogue between partners. Virtue in woman was still associated with silence, vice with articulateness³³ – Shakespeare's articulate heroines would seem to be exceptions to the social rule.

Throughout our analysis, of course, we must inspect the kinds of discourse used to construct the characters. Bianca is just as significant a construct as Katherine. Lucentio signals this with his Petrarchan hyperboles (1.1.157ff.). He describes exactly how Bianca is rendered in the text: 'Sacred and sweet was all I saw in her' [1.1.176].

One important interpretive construction put upon women like Kate in the time was the label 'curst' (see 1.2.85 and 3.2.144ff.). The word then customarily meant 'shrewish' (*OED*, 4). The text's repetition of the word causes it to revert to its second meaning, 'deserving of a curse, therefore wicked'. In men's eyes women like Kate appeared as monsters – and in reality scolds and cursers were likely to bring charges of witchcraft upon themselves. Petruchio's distortion and parody of Kate's behaviour is held to be an accurate reflection of what is taken by the community to be 'unnatural'.

His punishment of her (or is it therapy?) is to 'kill her in her own humour' (4.1.180). Perhaps it *is* therapy. Because Kate is articulate there is a danger of seeing her as a champion of female emancipation. We must remember her violence – she brings Bianca on stage at a rope's end (2.1.1). Petruchio in his soliloquy of 4.1 sees Kate in this way:

³² Underdown, 'The taming of the scold', p. 136; the influence of 'puritanism' on marriage is questioned by Kathleen Davies, 'Continuity and change in literary advice on marriage' in R. B. Outhwaite, ed., *Marriage and Society* (London, 1981), pp. 58–80.

³³ Jardine, *Still Harping on Daughters*, pp. 46–7.



13 Paula Dionisotti as a lobotomized Shrew in the Michael Bogdanov production for the Royal Shakespeare Company at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1978

Ay, and amid this hurly I intend
 That all is done in reverend care of her . . .
 This is a way to kill a wife with kindness
 And thus I'll curb her mad and headstrong humour.
 He that knows better how to tame a shrew,
 Now let him speak – 'tis charity to show.

(4.1.174–82)

Is this moral by virtue of being pragmatic, or is it to be delivered as Howard Keel did in *Kiss Me, Kate* (1953)? (He laughed sarcastically at the sentiments of the lines he had just spoken.) It is just possible that Petruchio is a reconstructed man after all – significantly *A Shrew* suppresses Petruchio's compassion (see 9.48–52). We might feel more confident of this, however, had Kate too been given a soliloquy in which to express her views on this therapy.

What of the final speech? Is its context that of game, with the implication that no statement is being made here? If there is irony, one way of bringing that out would be for the player to stress the word 'honest' in the lines:

And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his *honest* will . . .
(5.2.157–8)

‘Honest’ can mean not only worthy of honour but virtuous (*OED*, 2a and 13) – the implication being that a woman might rebel against a patriarchal husband as a revenger might take up arms against a tyrannical prince. (Does *A Shrew*, which legitimizes Kate’s submission by invoking in this speech the commonplace of a hierarchialized cosmos, record a male player’s subversion of tolerance?)

From a shrew we turn to a witch. Although England witnessed some outbreaks of persecution of female (and male) ‘witches’ led by religious zealots, voices were raised in the period to suggest that the driving forces behind the accusations derived from social stress and prejudice.³⁴ Elizabethan witchcraft prosecutions generally derived from accusations of evil practices (‘malefice’) and in England, unlike Scotland and continental Europe, there were few if any accusations of diabolism such as we see in *Dr Faustus*. This in itself suggests that witchcraft accusations were desperate remedies for communities with neither the science to explain accident, illness, and disease nor a constabulary able to investigate crime properly.

The problem was investigated by dramatists, notably by Dekker, Rowley, and Ford who, in 1621, collaborated on *The Witch of Edmonton*, basing their play on a pamphlet of the same year which reported on the discovery and execution of a ‘real witch’, Elizabeth Sawyer. By this time, in fact, the peak number of witchcraft convictions had passed and the number of acquittals was rising. The play, unlike the pamphlet, places as much stress on the poverty of the heroine and the way in which she is harassed by wealthy neighbours as it does on her ‘malefice’ and consequent dealings with the Devil. Her first and strong-lined speech seems designed to create a reservoir of sympathy that will not be drained by her subsequent actions:

And why on me? Why should the envious world
Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?
’Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,
And like a bow buckled and bent together
By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,
Must I for that be made a common sink

³⁴ See, for example, George Gifford’s *Discourse of the Subtle Practices of Devils by Witches and Sorcerers* (London, 1587) and *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft* (London, 1593). Alan Macfarlane offers the rise of individualism and decline of ‘neighbourly’ community as an explanation for witchcraft – see his *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* (London, 1970).

For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues
 To fall and run into? Some call me witch,
 And being ignorant of myself, they go
 About to teach me how to be one.

(2.1.1-10)

A sub-plot tells the story of Frank Thornley, a young man who is drawn into a bigamous but profitable marriage by a father whose estates are mortgaged. Dogged by the Devil, he tries to escape his predicament by killing his second wife. Neither character is responsible for the chain of events that leads to the fatal acts, and the isolation and social marginality of both is defined by a comic inset in which morris men create a mythical world of idealized neighbourliness.

Our third example of a female deviant is provided by Bellafront, the central figure in Dekker's two-part play *The Honest Whore*. Like *The Shoemakers' Holiday*, *1 Honest Whore* (1604-5) is resolved by the intervention of a prince, but the audience may feel that the social divisions that have been exposed during the course of the play have scarcely been overcome. The Duke's function is dictated by the author's need to close the play by concluding the comic intrigue, but the ending in fact suggests that although a prince may propose a solution, character and event combine to dispose – the Duke, after all, has to accept the marriage of his daughter with a man he had attempted to have poisoned. A resolute woman, the whore Bellafront, turns the tables on Matheo who had debauched her (3.3) – an unusual feature this, as generally it is the woman that is punished for a vice which must by its nature be mutually committed. The Duke cheers himself up thus:

Since Fate hath conquered, I must rest content,
 To strive now, would but add new punishment.

(5.2.389-90)

The theme of the play is constancy, constancy that is required to withstand a whirling world of social change, mortal decay, and moral corruption. In a significant piece of word-play on the words 'cousin' and 'cozen' (3.1.140-8) the bonds of family are set against new kinds of cash nexus. The virtue of constancy is incarnate in Candido the linen-draper, who refuses to lose his temper but calmly takes steps to have punished those who afflict him. It is notable not only that he is a citizen of honesty and integrity, standing against a gang of roaring boys, cheating gallants, and gulls representative of the unindustrious gentry, but that he is a full member of the Senate, a role he values. The city is no longer simply a 'unified' *locus*, as in classical comedy,

but a moralized focus of virtue – and of wealth, for we hear of a gentleman borrowing money from a citizen (2.1.113–14).

Bellafront, the whore whose role provides the title, is also constant, having been converted from her vocation by her love for Hippolito, successful suitor to the Duke's daughter. She, however, is the object of his tirades against her vocation. These passages seem to provide another example of a text that demonizes women. However, we can argue – and there is further pertinent material in the second part of the play (3.1) – that the misogynistic tirades (see *Part 1*, 2.1.319ff. and *Part 2*, 3.1.157ff.) are the consequence of obsession or guilt, and that the play is ironical, suggesting that the duty of chastity might be binding on men as well as women, a case strongly put to her husband by Bellafront in 4.1 of *Part 2*. Once converted, Bellafront stands as an emblem of chastity and constancy – a role she maintains through the second part of the play, although poverty almost compels her to revert to her trade (4.1). Overall the patient honest citizen and chaste and supportive wife serve as moral foils to the erring husbands and domineering wives found elsewhere in the play.

The first part of the play ends at the monastery of Bethlehem, where all are fools. Madness, we learn, has been caused by poverty and marital jealousy (5.2.173ff., 5.2.253) and by division between the professions (5.2.145ff.). *Part 2* assembles characters at the prison of Bridewell as a result of the Duke's desire to purge the city of whores, a ritual enactment of which was performed by London's apprentices every Shrove Tuesday. There the sternest punishment is meted out to Bots, the pander, and Matheo is saved from the penalty for his roistering by the intervention of his wife, Bellafront the reformed whore.

In one area of the study of family life, that of affective relationships between parents and pre-pubertal children, dramatic texts may have something to offer the historian. The pioneering modern historian of the family, Lawrence Stone, offered a picture of husbands and wives whose marriages had been arranged for dynastic reasons, beset by high mortality, and foolish if they invested 'too much emotional capital'³⁵ in children. Stone's conclusions are now discounted. Working from diaries and letters – and 'literature' – historians have found evidence of marriages, at least among the middling and lower orders, that derive from the mutual love and affection of the partners. (Ben Jonson's poem 'On My First Son' describes the boy's death as the repayment of a loan divinely bestowed – implying that the child generated the emotional capital rather than the parent.) Although it begs a lot of questions, a play like *The Winter's Tale* depends upon a situation where children

³⁵ *The Family, Sex, and Marriage 1500–1800* (London, 1977), p. 82.

are much valued and loved, and where there is strong endorsement of the need for mutual respect between the partners in a marriage. Elsewhere in Shakespeare it is implied that only those who have had children can know the bonds that bind parents to them.³⁶

Other cultures

As well as anatomizing their own nation, English dramatists offered their contemporaries some understanding of other cultures. Popular plays at the Red Bull may have been unashamedly chauvinist – after the publication of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* there is no doubt that England had a pride in herself as an elect nation – but the King's Men themselves brought to the Jacobean court reflections on real worlds elsewhere. In the 1590s, Roman plays had offered a comparative study of different kinds of constitution where there seemed to be few checks on rampant ambition, as in *Titus Andronicus*, or where the ideals of republicanism might be set against nascent imperialism, as in *Julius Caesar*. After his deeply complex meditation on the benefits of empire in *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare offered his fellow countrymen a complementary and thoroughgoing anatomy of colonialism in *The Tempest*, a text which stands in ideological opposition to, say, Edmund Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland*. The play is one of those that has spoken most loudly – but with two voices – to modern interpreters. To some, Prospero has appeared the perturbed philosopher-king restoring his lands to peace by an experiment in testing and Christian forgiveness.³⁷ He is the all-powerful magus, possessed of a quasi-divine power and, like a poet, able to transmute an iron age to gold. *Tempest*, however, is a metaphor for rebellion in the Virginia Company's pamphlet, *A True Declaration of Virginia*, one of the principal sources for Shakespeare's play: 'the broken remainder... made a greater shipwreck in the continent of Virginia by the tempest of dissension; every man over-valuing his own worth would be a commander, every man under-prizing another's value denied to be commanded.'³⁸ Having read that, we realize that the very title of the play becomes problematic: does it designate natural or cultural process? The tempest is not only a transcendent symbol but a cultural problem. It is, we are told, conjured by a magician: that Prospero can control the elements is concordant with the discourse of Orphean magic, the world of Ariel, discordant with discourse of *realpolitik*, the world of Antonio. If we emphasize the cultural-political

³⁶ *King John*, 3.4, *Macbeth*, 4.3.216, 3 *Henry VI*, 5.5.63–4.

³⁷ Robin Headlam Wells, *Shakespeare on Masculinity* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 177–206.

³⁸ Orgel, *The Tempest*, p. 219.

dimension of the play, Prospero becomes the arch-imperialist whose rule imposes a mortal wound upon the culture of Caliban, whose name indicates his affinities with the noble savages exalted by Montaigne in his essay 'Of the Cannibals'. The play is set vaguely in the Mediterranean, a Virgilian world, in fact, in that, like Aeneas, Alonso was voyaging from Carthage to Naples. But Shakespeare seems to be inscribing the culture of the new world upon the old, importing slavery from the Americas to anatomize relationships nearer home.³⁹ According to this kind of reading, moreover, Prospero seeks compulsively to impose his authority not only on his political enemies and colonized natives but on his daughter. Moreover, he had previously wrested the island from a woman, the witch Sycorax. The connection between these two kinds of rule is brought out in a well-known passage from *Civilization and its Discontents*, where Freud wrote: 'It is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built up upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression, or some other means?) of powerful instincts... Civilization behaves toward sexuality as a people or a stratum of its population does which has subjected another one to its exploitation.'⁴⁰ Instead of accepting Prospero's omnipotence, therefore, we might stress how, in what is essentially a comic moment, the wedding masque is interrupted – Prospero has forgotten the foul conspiracy. As a ruler he must abandon his role and resort to improvisation; as a poet he learns about the intractability of his material.

Shakespeare's anatomy of power is focused in a famous theatrical 'gest':⁴¹

PROSPERO	Lend thy hand And pluck my magic garment from me. [<i>Miranda helps him to disrobe</i>] Lie there, my art.	(1.2.24–6)
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This is the obverse of the famous moment in 1 *Tamburlaine*:

Lie here, ye weeds that I disdain to wear:
This complete armour and this curtle-axe
Are adjuncts more befitting Tamburlaine.
(1.2.237–8)

³⁹ It is significant, however, that it is only since about 1945 that critics and directors have thought in this way: see Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge, 1991).

⁴⁰ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. J. Strachey, in *Civilization, Society, and Religion* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 286, 294.

⁴¹ Hattaway, *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, p. 3.

Orgel usefully gives us in a footnote the famous story of Lord Burleigh: 'At night when he put off his gown, he used to say, lie there, *Lord Treasurer*.'

What does all this signify? Might not the separation of man from mantle signify the separation of authority from power? I am defining my use of these words from the moment in *King Lear* when Kent claims that the powerless abdicated king has 'authority' (1.4.30). It is a moment of demystification: power is associated with material reality, the cloak or the curtle axe (cutlass); it is instrumental and not the mystical adjunct of authority celebrated in the tournaments and shows of Elizabeth.

Power is related to sexuality and both are related to language. Prospero has usurped the rule of Caliban. Miranda taught him speech. Note how she is given, *pace* Dryden and a tradition of male editors, the line 'I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known' (1.2.356–7). Do we hear the accents of Miranda in Caliban's 'poetical' speeches? Does Prospero wish to suppress woman's language?

As well as emphasizing closure, the traditional end of comedy with its desired restoration of harmony and justice, we might note the unregeneracy of Antonio, and that Miranda's marriage has cost her her patrimony. (Perhaps, however, in this respect we could point out Prospero's political skill: by the reduction of Milan to a Neapolitan fiefdom Antonio becomes completely dispossessed.) Our views about Caliban's rights and Prospero's authority will be constructed partly out of our own ideological preconceptions – just as our ideological positions will be partly determined by our reading of the text. Prospero's aphorism about Caliban

A devil, a born devil, on whose nature
Nurture can never stick (4.1.188–9)

probably made many generations conscious of the ideology of culture.

Even though the play may have had more to do with Stuart ideals than New World realities, we cannot escape from colonialist discourse, just as we cannot escape from feminist discourse in *The Taming of the Shrew*. To suppress either is as political as foregrounding either, nor is there any evidence which allows the cultural historian to adjudicate between these competing readings. Instead, I think we must locate these readings in history, in a post-colonial age, and realize that Shakespeare is giving us an account of the *effects* of colonialism. Shakespeare is for all time by virtue of being of an age.

So is Jonson. One of the commonplaces of literary history is that the Renaissance produced a comedy of humours, plays about a constant human nature, whereas the Restoration gave us a comedy of manners, in which the characters are types of the society of their time. Jonson's own masterpiece

in this earlier genre, however, gives the lie to this opposition. For, in *Every Man in his Humour*, we learn that psychology depends upon society, nature upon nurture:

COB Nay, I have my rheum, and I can be angry as well as another, sir.

CASH Thy rheum, Cob? Thy humour, thy humour! Thou mistak'st.

COB Humour? Mack, I think it be so indeed: what is that humour? Some rare thing, I warrant.

CASH Marry, I'll tell thee, Cob: it is a gentleman-like monster, bred, in the special gallantry of our time, by affectation; and fed by folly.

(1616 version, 3.4.14–22)⁴²

Reading Elizabethan and Jacobean drama

What, in conclusion, might someone working on the relation between literature and society do these days? We must read not only social history but dramatic texts in the light of theory, all that has served to reveal ideological contests for cultural hegemony. We must consider not just individual characters but types and institutions: the family, guild, magistracy, court, state. We must not merely seek to set out the 'thought' of the time: cultural history has complemented and, usually, supplanted the old 'history of ideas'. We are often interested in 'ideas' only as they are imprinted and produced in language, frequently in significant interpretive metaphors – court, curst, tempest, *et al.* – of the kind I have investigated. We are involved in a kind of archeology on the text. We remember that *texts are history* and *history is text*.⁴³

In critical texts too we will note how descriptive metaphors turn out to be evaluative metaphors, revealing the ideological position of their authors. We shall attend to harmony, consistency, resolution, but also note discontinuities, divisions, dislocations, fracture, stylistic shifts – all those constructivist strategies, what T. S. Eliot called artistic 'impurities',⁴⁴ which 'make strange' for audiences and readers the presented realities.

We might try to isolate particular discourses within texts, concentrating not only on the moment of their production, but attending to successive inscriptions on them during the course of their history. And the contextual 'background' – which previously had served merely to highlight the profile of

⁴² The induction to the later *Every Man out of his Humour*, however, offers a metaphorical model of explanation that tends to the psychological.

⁴³ See Louis A. Montrose, 'Professing the Renaissance: the poetics and politics of culture' in H. Aram Veenser, ed., *The New Historicism* (London, 1989), pp. 15–36.

⁴⁴ *Selected Essays*, pp. 114ff.

the individual text – may give way to the notion of *intertextuality*, according to which no text is intelligible except in its relations with other texts.

Let us end with two examples, to see how this kind of reading may go. At the end of *The Tempest* the following exchange takes place:

PROSPERO Go, sirrah, to my cell;
 Take with you your companions. As you look
 To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.

CALIBAN Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter,
 And *seek for grace*. (5.1.291-5)

'Seek for grace' means sue for pardon – the phrase was used thus by Spenser. Orgel offers also 'favour' for grace. But is it not also apparent that the discourse of religion has been inscribed on the discourse of power, that signification serves legitimation? Caliban has been taught to perceive the ruler, dressed in a little brief authority, as omnipotent, sole dispenser of what is necessary for salvation.

As a prelude to our second example, let us recall T. S. Eliot on Middleton: ‘Middleton is solicitous to please his audience with what they expect; but there is underneath the same steady impersonal passionless observation of human nature . . . He has no message; he is merely a great recorder . . . Middleton is the greatest “realist” in Jacobean comedy.’⁴⁵ Here, to test the assertion, is the opening (abbreviated) of *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605):

*Enter (*I) WITGOOD, a Gentleman, solus*

WITGOOD (*2) All's gone! Still thou'rt a **gentleman**, that's **all**; but a **poor one**, that's **nothing**. (*3) What **milk** brings thy meadows forth now? Where are thy goodly **uplands**, and thy **downlands**? All sunk into that **little pit, lechery**. (*4) Why should a gallant pay but two shillings for his ordinary that nourishes him, and twenty times two for his brothel that **consumes** him... (*5) I dare not visit the city: there I should be too soon visited by **that horrible plague, my debts**; (*6) and by that means **I lose a virgin's love, her portion, and her virtues**. Well, how should a man live not that has no living? Hum. Why, are there not a million of men in the world that only sojourn upon their brain, and (*7) **make their wits their mercers**; and I am but one amongst that million, and cannot thrive upon't? (*8) Any trick, **out of the compass** of law, now would come happily to me.

Enter COURTESAN

COURTESAN (*9) My love!

WITGOOD My **loathing!** (*10) Has thou been the secret consumption of my
purse, and now comest to undo my last means, my wits? (*11) Wilt thou
leave no virtue in me, and yet thou ne'er the better?

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 167–9.

Hence courtesan, round webbed-tarantula,
That **dry'st the roses** in the cheeks of youth.

Middleton, *A Trick to Catch
the Old One*, 1.1.1ff.

In this passage I have inserted asterisked numbers to define 'lexias', blocks of signification,⁴⁶ and I have emboldened the metaphors, the interpretive constructions Middleton uses to build up his comic world. I leave it to the reader to determine whether he is 'passionless'.

(*1) Witgood's name contains the common pun on acuteness of mind and penis.⁴⁷ (*2) The first two sentences succinctly sum up all that has been termed 'the crisis of the aristocracy'. They construct a society in transition. A gentleman had originally been born to a rank as well as to wealth: the class had been defined by William Harrison as one who 'can live without manual labour'.⁴⁸ In the predatory London of the first years of King James money was supplanting rank as the source of all status. (*3) Wealth had derived from land, according to a 'natural order': hence Middleton feminizes the landscape of Witgood's estate. The uplands and downlands represent the breasts of fertility and the womb, source of new life but also the source of male pleasure. A second metaphor is superscribed, generating thereby a contradictory idea of woman: the fall of the gentleman in rank is analogous to Lucifer's fall into 'hell' – a bawdy designation for the vagina. What is thereby notable here, moreover, is the way that the relationship between work and wealth is completely suppressed in this discourse. (*4) By a suppressed synecdoche (the part for the whole) Witgood demonizes the brothel, the abode of the possessors of vaginas. There a man is apt not only to be stripped of his wealth but to be infected with the fires of venereal disease ('consumed').

The audience is by now aware of Witgood's egregious bad faith. It was not involuntarily that he went to the brothel, just as it was not (*5) a natural calamity that threw him into debt. (*6) Women he values not as sources of life but only as sources of living (wealth). (*7) In order to attain wealth he will do anything, including depriving the retailers of fine cloths of *their* legitimate living, the selling of means of concealment. (*8) 'Out of the compass of' seems ambiguous to the point of being contradictory: it means both illegal and devised according to the letter rather than the spirit of the law. (*9) Onto the nameless courtesan Witgood projects a hatred (like that of Dekker's

⁴⁶ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller (New York, 1974), p. 13.

⁴⁷ For the puns, see Gordon Williams, *A Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature*, 3 vols. (London, 1994).

⁴⁸ In Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles* (London, 1577), vol. 1, bk 2, chapter 5.

Hippolito, born of guilt?). (*10) Having drawn all money out of his purse (or vital spirit from his scrotum), the Courtesan now threatens to destroy his genitals ('wits'). (*11) Women had for him existed only as Petrarchan virgins: once deflowered, however, their insatiable sexual appetites suck, like a tarantula, the 'virtue' or power from a man, destroying the bloom of his youth.

This passage of prose is the work of a master. History is text and text is history: the balanced sentences are generated by a rhetoric in the service of a mind that will take no contemporary value for granted, no reality as unchanging. It is the work of a great entertainer, but one who deserves close attention. Middleton was a recorder who deployed language not only, as Eliot claimed, to record reality but to interrogate reality, not only to enable his contemporaries to recognize themselves, but to serve what Ben Jonson always claimed to be the prime function of theatre, understanding.

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4

MARTIN BUTLER

Private and occasional drama

THIS chapter will be discussing four traditions of occasional performance current during the Renaissance: the plays, masques, and miscellaneous entertainments written for the court, the Inns of Court, the universities, and the great provincial aristocratic houses. This drama comprises a small fraction of the period's output, and mostly it was performed only once and before tiny audiences. Yet because these audiences were drawn from the social and political élites, and because the staging was lavish and the rewards substantial, these four traditions had a high public profile, and virtually every major playwright contributed to one or other. Though Shakespeare wrote no court masques, he was probably involved in their performance and he devised at least one heraldic emblem for an Elizabethan tilt.

It is only a slight exaggeration to claim that almost all Elizabethan and early Stuart theatre was occasional. Since the playhouses changed their repertory from day to day, rarely did any play achieve a 'run' of multiple performances; and, as the companies toured the provinces or migrated between theatres, so any play would reach audiences that diverged widely in character and composition. Hence even in the commercial playhouses performances were occasional in spirit, profoundly conditioned by the contingencies of time and place; they could not be insulated against the pressures of the moment as in today's theatre they tend to be. For the rural villager or London citizen a theatre visit was a kind of holiday in miniature. From the player, the ever-changing repertory and audiences demanded a quickness of response and a willingness to permit the play to speak to the fitness of its occasion. (Edmund Gayton recounts the extreme case of a Shrove Tuesday audience that forced the players to abandon the tragedy they were performing in favour of *The Two Merry Milkmaids*.)¹ The insistent dialogue between text and occasion would be almost as continually present in the commercial playhouse as it inevitably was on the private stages.

¹ See Edmund Gayton, *Pleasant Notes upon Don Quixote*, quoted above, p. 58.

When Thomas Nashe wrote a pageant of the seasons for performance before Archbishop Whitgift at rural Croydon, *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592 or 93), he framed it with a 'real-life' presenter, Will Summers, who constantly interrupted the performance, joking, criticizing, applauding, even joining in. As the pageant proceeded with its celebration of the seasonal wheel and its lament for the brevity of the year and of life, so Summers was insensibly won over and eventually he confessed himself deeply moved by it. Of course Will Summers was himself part of the illusion, but he inhabited the same space as the play's audience and he projected Nashe's sense of the way that, in private theatricals, occasion was transformed into art. In such drama, Nashe reveals, it was the occasion that shaped the play, not vice versa, and the show was not as much a performance as an event. Its fulfilment depended on a fully social, and not merely theatrical enactment. So too Nashe's audience was not so much a public as a community, and the conventions that operated were less literary than festive ones. The occasion was itself the subject, and the play was a vehicle to affirm the social bondings dictated by the occasion.

Given these conditions, there were radical differences between private and public drama, in spite of the latter's occasional dimension. For example, in private theatre there could be no 'willing suspension of disbelief', for the element of compliment or masquerade could never wholly be effaced. Even at the court masques, which used spectacularly illusionist scenery, no spectator ever supposed that Britannocles was anyone other than King Charles. Similarly, at private performances dialogue in the usual sense could not take place; often characters would not talk together but address their remarks to the silent (but dominant) chief spectator. Furthermore, as Stephen Orgel has rightly emphasized,² a feature that crucially set private drama apart was the instability of the division between 'spectator' and 'participant'. The court masque in particular was unlike all other drama in that its formal culmination came when the masquers took dancing partners out of the audience and the line between player and spectator was abrogated. Even if other forms of private drama did not suspend that line, they still rendered it less visible – when Elizabeth saw Plautus' *Aulularia* at Cambridge in 1564, the university built her a seat on the stage and watched her watching the play; at Oxford in 1605, James's seat had to be moved so that he could be seen, and as a result he himself could hear nothing. The private performance was always a play-within-a-play, and the outer, framing play was a game which the audience played amongst themselves.

² See Orgel, *Illusion of Power*, *passim*.

It was of course in the nature of the sovereign's presence to turn any court performance into a dialogue, or to attract political applications, even to the most innocent of plays. For example, Lodowick Carlell's *The Deserving Favourite* (1629) has negligible political content (let alone aesthetic content), but after the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham any play with a title like this at Whitehall would have been charged with excitement. A similar kind of double vision clings to plays such as *Measure for Measure* or *The Tempest*, whose autocratic Dukes could at court be measured against King James (and not necessarily to James's advantage), while Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, with its induction for the public playhouse and separate prologue and epilogue for the court, is frankly two-faced – the court performance, where the Fair's anarchy was overlooked by the presence of the King, would have been quite different from the public ones. Even in a piece like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the allusion to the 'fair vestal throned by the West' who alone is beyond Cupid's power (2.1.158) would gain a special resonance from the presence of the Virgin Queen: the compliment to Elizabeth's chastity supplies the play's one missing term while reaffirming her authority outside the play in terms of her iconography of sexual transcendence.

I

The play which more than any other crystallized the genre of the 'offering to the prince' was George Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* (c. 1581–4), which deploys a charming but sophisticated scheme of royal flattery. This play, though probably staged at court, resembles the entertainments mounted for royal progresses in the country in its combination of pastoral setting, mythological fable, and ethico-political debate. Peele dramatized the myth of Paris' choice between Venus, Juno, and Pallas, moralizing it conventionally as an allegory of the claims of love, power, and 'chivalry'. Accused by the gods of 'partiality', Paris eloquently defends his decision to give the golden apple to Venus, but the debate cannot be resolved at this level and he is dismissed to Troy and his tragic destiny. The play seems to be over, but at this point Peele innovates by eliding the ethical impasse and the boundaries of the play simultaneously: Diana is nominated to readjudicate the choice and she reaches out beyond the fiction to offer the apple to Elizabeth. Elizabeth's new Troy reverses the tragic doom of the old because her chastity embodies that national inviolability against which it had been Paris' crime to transgress.

The resonance of *The Arraignment of Paris* derives from the manifold ways it figures the games of Elizabethan courtship.³ As a shepherd who

³ This paragraph draws heavily on Montrose, 'Gifts and reasons'. See also von Hendy, 'The triumph of chastity', and Braunnmuller, *George Peele*, chapter 3.

is wooed by two goddesses and patronized by a third, Paris replicates all those courtier-poets who advertised their part in the competition for honours in the language of pastoral or Petrarchan romance. His plea that he would rather have poverty with contentment than wealth or fame without it (926–42) is disingenuous in view of numerous comparable claims by ambitious courtiers. Similarly, the golden apple which is given to Elizabeth at the end resembles those rich gifts that passed between Queen and courtiers every New Year's Day and which are meticulously listed in the court accounts. Such symbolic exchanges affirmed the bonds between patron and client, celebrating the Queen's power but also signalling her dependence on her (unpaid) servants. The play is in itself one such offering; culminating in an essentially social ritual of deference, it advances Peele's own claims to be considered for preferment. And the form which Peele devises expresses his dependence in the most startling way possible: the dilemmas enacted within the fiction can only be resolved by shattering it in the acknowledgment of a redeeming presence outside the world of the play. The sudden recognition of the Queen saves the drift towards tragedy, but only at the expense of the abdication of the playwright in the face of a superior authority who guarantees such resolutions in fiction and in fact.

The form defined by Peele was clearly to be important for the Jacobean masque, and it is the actual or implied norm for much Elizabethan court drama. Plays such as Marston's *Histrionmastix* (1598) and Dekker's *Old Fortunatus* (1599) culminate with similar moments of recognition which abrogate the fictional worlds of the plays. Elizabeth is the transcendental signified of which the moral personifications in the plays (Astraea, Virtue, Fame, etc.) are the mere signs:

VIRTUE

All these that thus do kneel before your eyes,
Are shadows like myself: dread Nymph, it lies
In you to make us substances.

(*Old Fortunatus*, 5.2.337–9)

In Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599) and *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), the Queen's presence is invoked rather more conditionally, as an exploration of the debt royal fame owes to the creative powers of the artist. In *Cynthia's Revels* in particular, Cynthia has little more to do than to authorize the court reformation which Crites, the courtier, scholar, and poet, has already set in motion. But the dramatist who most fully exploited this form was John Lyly, whose *Sappho and Phao* (?1584), *Gallathea* (c. 1583–5), and *Endymion* (1588) use mythological fictions to conduct a

sustained exploration of the same iconography and social practices with which *The Arraignment of Paris* was engaged.

Older commentators used to read Lyly's plays as allusive and specific allegories of court life; they are, rather, prismatic refractions of the serious game played continually between courtier and royal mistress. Their actions turn on fables of frustrated courtship of a mistress who is at one and the same time enticing and chaste, proud, remote, inscrutable, desirable, and dangerous. In *Sappho and Phao*, Venus confers unsurpassable beauty on Phao, the common ferryman, and Cupid strikes the great lady Sappho in love with him. Sappho comes close to declaring her love but gains control of Cupid and starts redirecting his arrows. Her power is proved by her resistance to love, but it is counterpointed with the plight of Phao, whose worth can be pitied but never requited. In *Endymion*, the plight of the courtier who falls in love with Cynthia, the moon, is avowedly a metaphor for the frustrated client. Bewitched by a former mistress, Tellus, into an age-long sleep from which he will awake an old man, Endymion resembles those real-life courtiers who enacted their lack of favour or reward on the tiltyard in the roles of disconsolate knights, shepherds, or hermits. Lyly's drama is saved from preciousity by its underlying humanist concerns and its recurrent suggestions of criticism of Cynthia. In *Endymion*, there is more than a hint that Tellus projects the dark side of Cynthia's radiance; it takes Cynthia's chaste kiss of favour to wake Endymion from his enchanted sleep. In *Gallathea*, the fable (in which two young girls, disguised as boys to evade a local custom of virgin sacrifice, fall innocently in love with each other) is a vehicle for a debate between Venus and Diana which is resolved in favour of Venus: if Diana wants her nymphs not to suffer for their chastity, she must give place to the claims of love.⁴

Behind such plays one readily senses the influence of entertainments devised to welcome Elizabeth during her summer progresses. Except for the 1580s, Elizabeth toured the south and east of England extensively throughout her reign, and wherever she went fictions were staged to express the delight of the locality at her arrival. It is in these entertainments that some of the most characteristic tropes of Elizabethan courtship first became current. Elizabeth was repeatedly welcomed as a goddess whose presence brings summer to the locality and turns everyday into holiday. At Kenilworth in 1575 the castle clock was stopped while she was there; at Bedington in 1599, Sir Francis Carew artificially delayed the ripening of his cherry trees so that her arrival seemed to produce spring out of season. Greetings would be spoken

⁴ *Endymion* is studied in relation to mid-century court entertainments by Marie Axton in 'The Tudor masque and Elizabethan court drama' in M. Axton and R. Williams, eds., *English Drama: Forms and Development* (Cambridge, 1977), pp. 24-47. For *Gallathea*, see A. R. Braunmuller's chapter, above, pp. 53-92.

by gruff porters and elegant country deities. At Kenilworth (which is the first entertainment to appropriate Arthurian legendary material for compliment of the Queen), Elizabeth was welcomed by the Lady of the Lake and by a salvage man; at Elvetham in 1592, the deities included Sylvanus, Neptune, Oceanus, and Neaera. The Fairy Queen herself first turned up at Woodstock in 1575, and she was joined at Elvetham by the Fairy King, Oberon. Elizabeth's part was to receive costly gifts, partake of alfresco banquets and rise to the roles that were offered her; she also liked to shoot at deer from standing butts. It is only a short step from these semi-dramatic welcomes to such fully achieved dramas as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Considerable ironies attach themselves to these occasions, as later to the Stuart masques; their assurances of unfeigned devotion sit uneasily with private letters expressing anxiety about the fitness or the cost. The climate of the welcomes is carefree, but the £700 that Sir Julius Caesar spent in two days at Mitcham in 1598 included the charges of five earlier reports of Elizabeth's imminent arrival that proved to be false alarms; Sir Henry Lee wrote to Cecil in 1600 urging him to prevent a visit from the Queen which he could ill afford.⁵ Not merely the Queen but the whole royal entourage had to be lodged and rewarded; the Earl of Hertford built an entire temporary palace at Elvetham in 1591, as well as excavating a lake. The gifts that Elizabeth expected were stupendously expensive, but had to be given under a pretence of being worthless trifles. The decorum of the occasion demanded that staggering sums be seen to be casually squandered on a single day's entertainment.

On the other hand, the value of such progresses was the opportunity they provided for the establishing of 'points of contact' between monarch and people. John Strype wrote that 'by these means showing herself so freely and condescendingly unto her people, she made herself dear and acceptable unto them', so creating 'mutual love and affection'.⁶ Even in the worst weather, Elizabeth was careful to display herself to her subjects; the welcomes that were presented to royalty were also an occasion for the theatrical presenting of royalty. On entry to a city the keys would be delivered to the Queen and returned to the aldermen, a symbolic exchange that resembled the acknowledgment of reciprocal obligations in *The Arraignment of Paris*. The recorder would then use his oration to proffer advice or solicit goodwill (as at Worcester in 1575, for example). Entertainments on country estates

⁵ J. Lyly, *Queen Elizabeth's Entertainment at Mitcham*, ed. L. Hotson (New Haven, Conn., 1953), p. 11; E. K. Chambers, *Sir Henry Lee* (Oxford, 1936), p. 180.

⁶ Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions*, 1.67, 70. Strype is discussing entertainments presented to Elizabeth in the first year of her reign.

typically represented Elizabeth as the presiding genius of a rural festival. At Kenilworth, a morris, a May Lady, and the annual Shrove Tuesday pageant from Coventry were brought in; at Sudeley in 1592 only the weather prevented a sheep-shearing feast; and at Bisham in the same progress she was met by Ceres and the harvest-cart, the harbinger of a domestic golden age of which she was crowned the May Queen. On these occasions Queen and people played out a myth of holiday solidarity that underpinned a political ideology of national unity. It is a commonplace to note that the lesser public visibility of James and Charles and the decline of the royal progress in the early seventeenth century may have helped weaken those symbolic bonds which Elizabeth was careful to assert. Morris dances, mummings, and seasonal feasts reappear in Stuart masques but as rituals which affirm the royal sense of difference from the people. The one Stuart provincial entertainment of any real stature, Ben Jonson's rollicking *Masque of Metamorphosed Gypsies* (1621), subverts the Elizabethan form by presenting James as fleeced rather than welcomed by aristocratic subjects disguised as gypsies. Jonson's country masque exposes the pretence at the heart of the show of deference: the 'unfeigned' welcome is suspiciously close to a strategy by which mendacious courtiers pick honours and offices from the royal pocket.⁷

Elizabethan progresses were no less opportunities for courtship, but the agreed language was controlled by a greater tact: Sir Edward Dyer's response to disgrace at court was a song of Despair that was sung to the Queen by a musician hidden in an oak tree at Woodstock. The humanist principle of debate that put intellectual flesh on the bones of the spectacle meant that welcomes were often veiled criticism of policy or attempts at political persuasion. Often Elizabeth found herself invited to resolve a dispute between two characters in which serious issues were at stake beneath the game. In Sir Philip Sidney's *The Lady of May*, performed at Wanstead in 1578 under the sponsorship of the Earl of Leicester, the title character warned her that in the debate she was to adjudicate lurked a coded bid for the royal hand by Elizabeth's most eligible English suitor: 'in judging me you judge more than me in it'.

In the context of anxieties over the succession, much court drama before the establishment of the myth of virginity celebrated by Lyly and Peele addressed questions of marriage. 'This is all against me', Elizabeth said to the Spanish ambassador during a play of 1565 in which Juno debated with Diana; at a court marriage in 1566 the choice of Paris was again staged, but this time the apple went to the bride.⁸ In particular, Leicester used festivity

⁷ See D. B. J. Randall, *Jonson's Gypsies Unmasked* (Durham, N.C., 1975).

⁸ Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, pp. 49 and 1.

to advance his claim to Elizabeth's affections, beginning in 1561 when, as Robert Dudley, he took the part of Prince Pallaphilos, suitor of Pallas, at the Inner Temple Christmas revels; the role of Olympian champion closely shadowed his militant and anti-Catholic political position. Fifteen years on, the courtship culminated at Kenilworth in a series of interwoven narratives that praised marriage and long-suffering faith, and disparaged virginity. The fictions at Kenilworth were singularly transparent. Leicester's poet, George Gascoigne, admitted that the gifts which had been feigned to be sent by the gods were actually paid for by his patron, and Elizabeth was regaled by presentations involving the Lady of the Lake who is assailed by Sir Bruce Sans Pity, and the cruel nymph Zabeta whose repulses to her suitors have turned them into monsters. But the hazard of occasional drama is that events may not turn out as anticipated: Elizabeth obligingly freed the Lady from Sir Bruce's attentions and failed to be impressed by the song of Deep Desire, transformed into a quaking holly bush. Three years later at Wanstead, which was very much Leicester's final throw, invited by Sidney's May Lady to choose between an active forester and a submissive shepherd – with strong hints that the forester was to be preferred – she chose the shepherd. Sidney's bitter epilogue presented the Queen with the 'rosary' on which Leicester used to pray to St Elizabeth with the plea 'love me much better than you were wont'.⁹

In the following decades the iconography changed: Sidney's last major appearance was as one of the *Four Foster Children of Desire*, in a spectacular tilt of 1581 (during Elizabeth's courtship by the Duke of Alençon) at which the knights jousting in the name of Desire finally acknowledged defeat at the hands of the champions of Perfect Beauty. The knights of Desire were warned not to 'destroy a common blessing for a private benefit: Will you subdue the sun, who shall rest in the shadow where the weary take breath, the disquiet rest, and all comfort, will ye bereave all men of those glistening and gladsome beams'.¹⁰ The later Elizabethan welcomes elaborated themes common to European state festivals (such as the enchanted knights and hermits at Ditchley in 1592), but the roles scripted for the Queen were those of remote and idealized goddesses – Gloriana, Cynthia, Astraea. *Summer's Last Will and Testament* glances sideways at such royal revelry with a promise that Summer will not expire until Elizabeth has finished her progress, and he bequeathes her what remains of his warm days to keep her unvexed (133–6, 1841). However, at the Archbishop's Croydon, where the Queen was not

⁹ R. Kimbrough and P. Murphy, 'The Helmingham Hall manuscript of Sidney's *The Lady of May*: a commentary and transcription', *RenD* n.s. 1 (1968), 119.

¹⁰ Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge, 1980), p. 75.



14 The *impresa* portrait of the Earl of Cumberland by Nicholas Hilliard. George Clifford, as Queen's champion, is dressed for the tilt (see p. 136)

present, such an allusion only served to intensify the awareness of this audience, hedged about by plague and fading summer, that for mere mortals such mythologization was not a real possibility.

II

Under Elizabeth's successor, the court masque quickly emerged as the leading state entertainment. The form of the Jacobean masque, in which scenery, song, and speech were brought together within a single, integral fable that accommodated flattery of the monarch with an opportunity for social dancing



15 Detail of the private wedding masque from the portrait of Sir Henry Unton

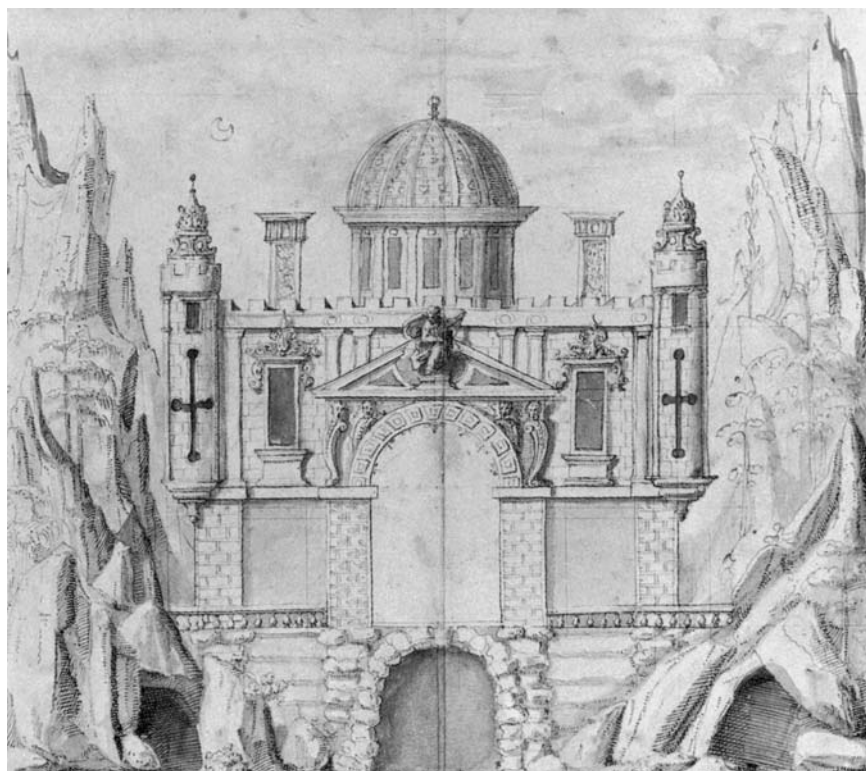
between masquers and audience, was first completely achieved in a late-Elizabethan entertainment, Francis Davison's *Proteus and the Adamantine Rock* (1595). However, it would be misleading to represent the Stuart masque as the culmination of a continuous, quasi-evolutionary process. There was no steady flowering as the form of festival was dictated by the changing social,

economic, and political requirements of the court. Royal revelry was first systematically promoted by Henry VIII, who desired to compete publicly with the powerful and high-profile monarchies of Francis I and Charles V. The typical Henrician revel was a neo-medieval tilt or an entry into the court by disguised dancers on a spectacular pageant wagon such as a castle or a rock, displaying the self-confidence and charm of an ambitious prince and mimicking the glamorous chivalry of Burgundian court festivals. Elizabethan revels seem diffuse and heterogeneous by comparison, largely because Elizabeth herself withdrew to the role of principal spectator and failed to sponsor large-scale festivity: entertainments were presented to the Queen rather than by her, and their forms were improvised to suit the occasion. James and Charles on the other hand were prepared to lavish substantial sums on festivity and to exploit its potential for political statement. The masque developed as their preferred form primarily because of its ritual and almost mystical dimensions: it celebrated the dignity of the prince and choreographed the court into an act of homage to his magical centrality. Furthermore, the masques' emphasis on ceremony, royal glory, and courtly elegance suited the purposes of two monarchs whose attitude towards the dynastic and religious conflicts of Europe was unpopularly pro-Spanish or at best neutral, pacific, and non-interventionist. In striking contrast with the often militantly Protestant and nationalist tone of Elizabethan tilts, the lauding in many Stuart masques of England's peace and separateness from a war-torn Europe marks a significant political as well as artistic departure. The masques ushered the Stuarts into an international community by cultivating the visual and political language of pan-European absolutism.

There has been a tendency to speak of 'the Jonsonian masque' as if Jonson's masques were somehow paradigmatic for the Jacobean form. It is certainly true that Jacobean masquing was dominated by Ben Jonson, whose thirty or so masques, tilts, and welcomes constitute the single most sustained and elaborate exploration of the potentialities of court revel. Yet the *Masque of Queens* (1609), which from many points of view appears the quintessential Jonsonian masque, was achieved only after several years of formal experiment, and embodies a norm which was no sooner realized than it began to be modified. Moreover, though Jonson invented the 'double masque' with separate entries for male and female masquers (*Hymenaei*, 1606) and in *Queens* turned the 'antemasque' (a prefatory show) into the 'antimasque' (a structural foil to the main masque), other crucial innovations occurred in non-Jonsonian contexts. It was Samuel Daniel who first used more than one change of scene and a song for the masquers' departure (*Tethys' Festival*, 1610), and Thomas Campion who first introduced an antimasque subsequent to the main masque and a scene that depicted a setting familiar to

the audience (*The Somerset Masque*, 1613) – all of these were to become commonplace features. It is tempting to argue that the single most important event for the development of the form must have been the journey to Italy in 1613 by the principal masque designer, Inigo Jones, and the technological possibilities that Jones's experience of Italian court revel opened up, and yet from another angle no less important must have been the musical trend at about the same time towards the declamatory ayre associated with the vocal writing of Nicholas Lanier and, later, Henry Lawes. As a masque was a multi-media event involving song, dance, architecture, painting, and some poetry, it was difficult for any one contributor completely to dominate it. Equally crucial in the determining of a masque must have been who was paying, who was dancing, and what the social and/or political significances of the occasion were. The masque writer had not only to accommodate his ideas to the scenic and musical skills at his disposal, he had tactfully to negotiate the complex statements and counter-statements passing in the event between King, Queen, Prince, and lords. Little wonder that we often sense that the author was embarrassed, or read contemporary reports that 'the masque did not please'.

Jonson's achievement in the masque was to construct forms which held these competing imperatives in a unity while leaving him free to advance his own elevated notions of the educational potential of recreation, the ability of the masques' 'high and hearty inventions' insensibly to refine their participants by laying hold 'on more removed mysteries' (*Hymenaei*, Preface). His major early performances, *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), *Hymenaei* (1606) and *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), attempted to achieve this by distilling into the ephemeral occasion an unprecedented density of classical learning and symbolic meaning. The performers were participating in no mere courtly masquerade but a ceremony weighty with political and intellectual significance. Each masque was, loosely, a quest, and the event was made performative of the King's authority because the fictions cast him as the object of the masquers' search; their political dimensions derived from the way that each celebrated or enacted James's none-too-popular intention of imposing political unity onto his two kingdoms, turning England and Scotland magically into Great Britain. In *Blackness*, the word 'Britannia' resolves a riddle the answer to which the masquers, daughters of Niger, are seeking out; in *Beauty* the same masquers reappear, their black skins transformed by the miraculous power of royal Albion. In *Hymenaei*, Jonson turned a court marriage into a bravura affirmation of the concept of Union: James was greeted as the embodiment of a principle which, in ways both obvious and mystical, sustains the entire universe. And yet structurally these masques remain Elizabethan in feel. The speaking characters were essentially



16 Inigo Jones, scene for *Oberon*, 1611

presenters rather than participants, and they inducted masquers who (in *Blackness* and *Beauty*) arrived on what underneath were old-fashioned pageant cars. Nor was the staging fully integral to the action, but basically still a static setting; in *Hymenaei* and *Beauty* the staging was dispersed, not focused on a single point as would later become the norm. It was Inigo Jones rather than Jonson who made the King symbolically central to the masque by placing him opposite the meeting-point of the lines of perspective, privileging him as the only member of the audience with an undistorted view of the spectacle.

Jonson's structural innovations in *The Masque of Queens* (1609) were no less dependent on Jones's technological developments. Earlier masques made use of the *machina versatilis* or 'turning machine', a scenic unit which revolved to discover hidden masquers. *Queens*, however, opened with 'an ugly hell' before which twelve witches danced in an attempt to curse the glory of the court; but suddenly 'the whole face of the scene altered, scarce suffering the memory of any such thing', in place of which were revealed

the masquers seated in the House of Fame. Jonson appears to be describing the *scena ductilis*, or system of sliding flats which enabled the entire setting, and not only one unit, to be changed at a stroke. This arrangement turned the masque from a static presentation or discovery into a dynamic action. Queen Anne and her eleven accompanying 'queens' entered the action in a blaze of light before which the witches vanished as if insubstantial; their triumphant discovery mimed the victory of truth over falsehood and fame over envy under the approving and controlling gaze of the royal spectator. The witches were dynamically situated as 'antimasquers', characters who not only introduce but oppose the main masquers, and the masque turned on a principle of contestation in which the enemies of kingship were subordinated by kingly power. Of course, this is not conventional dramatic conflict, as Stephen Orgel has emphasized: unlike opposing characters on the public stages, the masquers and antimasquers cannot occupy the same space, and the queens have only to appear for the witches to vanish.¹¹ But that is part of the masque's political point: the victory of royal authority was represented as instantaneous and effortless.

The form established in *Queens* was to become standard for Jonson's subsequent masques. Indeed, in comparison with the multiple scene-changes of later Caroline masques, Jonson showed little desire to move any further in the direction of complexity, and the principles of contestation and single magical transformation remained germane in his practice to the end. However, this form was to come under pressure through changing political circumstances and through Jonson's personal ambivalence about a court which, notwithstanding, he chose to celebrate. The worry about the extravagance of court masques which contemporaries sometimes voiced occasionally surfaced in Jonson's writings: in *Love Restored* (1612), one antimasquer was a puritan complaining about the expense of court revelry. More personal to the masque writer was the anxiety that the idealization he was compelled to perform might not be the 'teaching through praise' which theoretically it was – leading men into virtue by writing roles which depicted what they should be, rather than what they were – but an inducing of self-congratulation or a papering-over of cracks (Jonson confronted this issue directly in his 'Epistle to Selden' and 'To my Muse'). Such anxieties can only have intensified in the wake of scandal following the discovery that the courtier Sir Thomas Overbury had been poisoned at the instigation of the wife of the Earl of Somerset, the favourite for whom Jonson's *Irish Masque* and *Challenge at Tilt* (1613–14) had been written, and the meteoric rise at court of the glamorous George Villiers, future Duke of Buckingham. To write a masque called

¹¹ Stephen Orgel, *The Jonsonian Masque* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), p. 139.

The Golden Age Restored in 1616 required either an excess of complacency or an excess of faith in the admonitory and persuasive power of art.

The changing political climate affected Jonson's masques in two ways. Firstly, in the masques following *Queens*, there is a tendency for the central transformations to become more provisional, a matter of gradual refinement rather than a switching between absolutes.¹² One sign of this was a willingness to accommodate the antimasquers into the main masque instead of banishing them outright. In *Oberon* (1611), the antimasquers were playful satyrs who had to be instructed not to disturb the solemn celebration but who remained on stage during the triumph of the Fairy King; in *The Vision of Delight* (1617), they were fantastic rather than threatening, and were openly part of the evening's amusements. Such accommodations were underlined by the masques' increasing concessions to comedy: in entertainments such as *Christmas his Masque* (1617) and *Pan's Anniversary* (1621), the comic world of the antimasquers was invoked in such density as to make it difficult to dismiss them out of hand. Further, Jonson's middle masques tended to dwell self-reflexively and critically on the nature of revelling itself, and to treat the miraculous transformations as something problematic rather than to be taken for granted. The outstanding instance here is *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618), in which the masquers appear only after the conditions of their idealization have been carefully defined. The antimasque mounts a dramatic fable around the archetype of heroic virtue, Hercules. Hercules rests from the laborious life of virtue, but only when it is established that relaxation does not mean concession to vice: he first has to defeat Bacchus, symbol of riotous indulgence, and the pigmies, symbols of human littleness, who would kill him if he slept too deeply. The masquers themselves descend from the Hill of Knowledge, but they return to it at the end: their sojourn with pleasure is represented as only temporary, and they are led by 'Daedalus the wise' who sings that dancing involves its own discipline:

For dancing is an exercise
 Not only shows the movers wit,
 But maketh the beholder wise
 As he hath power to rise to it
(269–72)

Jonson flatters the masquers as 'born to know' (225) but still insists that their virtue has to be acquired. If other masques made courtly grace look inherent and effortless, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* disclosed virtue as

¹² These developments are considered at greater length by Stephen Orgel in "To make boards speak": Inigo Jones's stage and the Jonsonian masque', *RenD* n.s. 1 (1968), 121–52.



(a)



(b)

17 Inigo Jones, designs for an antimasque, probably the contents of the cooking pot in Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph*, 1624–5: (a) a turkey and an unknown animal, (b) a fish and an unknown bird (see p. 147)

something constructed and sustained, exposing the social engineering beneath the court's miraculous power.

Secondly, Jonson's late masques responded to the political anxieties of the 1620s by increasingly insisting on the social dimensions of the form: the antimasquers excluded from the celebration were represented as common people, vulgar, inquisitive, impertinent, or foreign. Particularly, in the context of James's initiative for wedding Prince Charles to the Spanish

Infanta, Jonson found himself using the antimasques to censure would-be political commentators, newsmongers, and satirical poets.¹³ Several of these late masques fall frankly into two halves. In *News from the New World* (1620), *The Masque of Augurs* (1622), *Time Vindicated* (1623), and *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion* (1624), the antimasque and masque comprise two opposed worlds, and there is barely any fable or action which connects them: the banishing of antimasque by masque was not a process of education or confutation but simply a *fait accompli* (see pp. 144–5). It is difficult not to feel that the situation of the late-Jacobean court was putting Jonson's form under considerable strain. In *Neptune's Triumph*, a masque written for the Infanta-less return of Prince Charles from Spain, Jonson, unhappy with the countrywide rejoicing at the collapse of royal policy, astonishingly represented the real enemy not as Spain but as the politically minded common people.

Jonson was well suited for the role of principal masque-poet because of his respect for James's pacific and internationalist policies and his distaste for what he saw as popular religious and political fanaticism. However, other masque-poets registered varying degrees of unease about the court and practised the form in ways that rendered it more problematic. Many outside the court saw masques as inherently suspect; it is no accident that several plays of the period use them as symbols of courtly waste, secrecy or duplicity. Others – most famously Francis Bacon, who said 'these things are but toys',¹⁴ – dismissed the educational or political pretensions which Jonson pursued in the form. Yet Bacon himself wrote tilt speeches for the Earl of Essex and spent £2,000 on presenting *The Masque of Flowers* (1614) to the Earl of Somerset: clearly he knew that revels could be useful vehicles for mediation and insinuation, criticism and compliment.

The debate over the value of revels was thrashed out in prefaces to masques published by Jonson and his rival Samuel Daniel, who won the commission for the very first Stuart masque, *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604). Daniel implicitly took up cudgels with Jonson by disclaiming any 'mystical interpretations' (35) and disparaging the seriousness of his masque's mythology: 'whosoever strives to show most wit about these punctilios of dreams and shows are sure sick of a disease they cannot hide' (200–2).¹⁵ In *Tethys' Festival* (1610), he further contradicted Jonson's belief that words were the 'soul' of the masque that survived after the 'body' (the performance) had been forgotten (*Hymenaei*, Preface) by insisting that 'in these things... the

¹³ There is an important account of Jonson's late masques by Sara Pearl, "'Sounding to present occasions": Jonson's masques of 1620–5' in Lindley, *The Court Masque*, pp. 60–77.

¹⁴ F. Bacon, *The Essays or Counsels*, ed. M. Kiernan (Oxford, 1985), p. 117.

¹⁵ Quoted from the edition by Joan Rees in Spencer and Wells, *A Book of Masques*.

only life consists in show'.¹⁶ A client of Queen Anne, Daniel was none the less deeply sceptical about the forms of panegyric he was expected to write. *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* memorialized the union of the kingdoms by depicting the masquers descending from a remote mountain, but the chosen form – a procession by threes alternating with torchbearers – was stiffly old-fashioned, and his verses repeatedly insisted that this was only a masquerade (in contrast to Jonson, who was inclined to efface the distinction between masquer and role). Daniel was careful not to idealize, even while he celebrated; his court play, *The Queen's Arcadia* (1605), significantly depicted an imaginary kingdom undergoing reformation.¹⁷

Few authors can have felt as uncomfortable about their masques as Daniel, but there were times when conditions at court enabled masques to be receptive to sentiments or attitudes which ordinarily were beyond their scope. In particular, during the period in which Prince Henry (d. 1612) was politically active, and during the diplomacy that culminated in the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Calvinist Prince Frederick of the Rhine, court festival was several times used to promote policies that cut across James's non-interventionist stance. Henry died at the early age of nineteen, but there had already begun to develop – or to be developed for him – a mythology that cast him in the role of warrior-prince, a militant Calvinist hero who was destined to be a political champion of Protestantism and under whom England would again become a significant European power. James had other ideas for Henry: he intended to wed him to a Catholic princess, a plan complementary to his wedding of his daughter to a Calvinist and part of his studiously non-confessional position on Europe's religious divisions. What Henry's private views were we cannot tell, but he allowed himself to be seen in festival roles that had a significantly aggressive edge, and he enthusiastically resuscitated the court tilt, with all its nostalgic overtones of the (supposedly) interventionist days of Queen Elizabeth.¹⁸

Henry's festivals demonstrate how problematic is the interpretation of these deceptively simple masques: it is by no means clear whether the masques were advice to Henry or policy statements by him, and if the latter whether they were directed to the King or a wider public or both. Jonson, who in *Prince Henry's Barriers* (1610) and *Oberon* (1611) used Arthurian material positively for the only time in his career, was plainly embarrassed by the commissions. Obligated to write in praise of an uncongenial militarism, he

¹⁶ David Lindley, ed., *Court Masques* (Oxford, 1995), p. 55.

¹⁷ On Daniel, see John Pitcher, "In those figures which they seeme": Samuel Daniel's *Tethys' Festival* in Lindley, *The Court Masque*, pp. 33–46.

¹⁸ See Roy Strong, *Henry, Prince of Wales and England's Lost Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986).



18 Inigo Jones, Prince Henry as Oberon, from Jonson's *Oberon, the Fairy Prince*, 1611

paused in the *Barriers* to defend the arts of peace and used Oberon to urge Henry to be dutiful to his father: the two entertainments endeavoured to work out common ground between King and Prince (see p. 149). Daniel also praised trade and industry in Henry's investiture masque, *Tethys' Festival* (1610), but he was more respectful of the sub-Arthurian iconography which made Jonson so uncomfortable. His masque dwelt on England's naval strength and located Henry firmly in the Tudor tradition. Presented with Astraea's sacred sword, Henry was provocatively identified as Elizabeth's heir; the chivalric and Spenserian dimensions of this masque were in implicit tension with the classical and imperial iconography that Jonson devised for James.

Henry did not live to see his sister's wildly popular marriage (1613), but his influence can still be felt behind the revels that celebrated it. The official festival (as it were) was Thomas Campion's *The Lords' Masque*. Campion, a client of James's favourite the Earl of Somerset, was not without a heightened sense of the difficulties of panegyric.¹⁹ However, *The Lords' Masque* (possibly the most elaborate Jacobean masque) attempted to contain the Calvinist marriage within a perspective acceptable to the King by disparaging prophetic enthusiasm in the antimasque and emphasizing that the celebrations were controlled by the peace of Jove. Rather different were two masques brought to court by gentlemen of the Inns of Court. Francis Beaumont's *Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn* was on the Spenserian theme of the wedding of the Rhine and the Thames and included a country morris dance; Beaumont's masquers danced in the roles of priestly knights, consecrated to ideals of ancient and pious heroism. George Chapman's *Memorable Masque* made fun of a frivolous courtier and featured Virginian Indians converted to true religion after the British example; the golden age Chapman had in mind would have come about through respect for honour and law, and through industrious colonial enterprise. It has recently been discovered that some people even had plans for an apocalyptic *Masque of Truth* that openly depicted England leading the Protestant nations in the struggle against Spain and Rome.²⁰ Not surprisingly, this never left the drawing-board, but it suggests how misleading it is to think of the masque as merely a vehicle for the royal ideology; masques could be used to talk back to the king in his own language.

The last major flourishing of the masque came in the 1630s, during the long Caroline peace. These were the most spectacular masques of all,

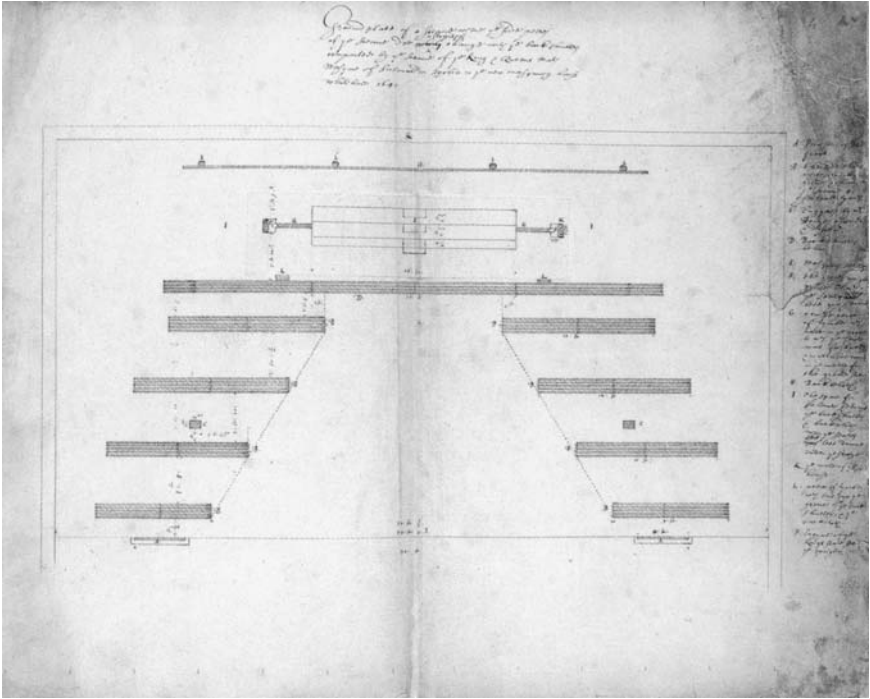
¹⁹ Campion's masques are fully considered by David Lindley in *Thomas Campion* (Leiden, 1986).

²⁰ D. Norbrook, "The Masque of Truth": court entertainments and international Protestant politics in the early Stuart period', *The Seventeenth Century* 1 (1986), 81–110.

distinguished by their multiple scene-changes, musical virtuosity, settings that ranged from heaven to hell, and by their consistently elevated tone of royal apotheosis. Charles's masque writers were rather second-order poets – Aurelian Townshend, William Davenant, and Thomas Carew – but the interest of the form was sustained by Inigo Jones's technological wizardry: Jones more than fulfilled Charles's wish to project royal power as a force that could transform stormy landscapes to serene gardens under the approving gaze of clouds of deities. Many of Jones's Caroline masques drew directly on Parisian or Florentine festivals, but the alliance between monarch and architect which they proclaimed was entirely characteristic of Jones's Augustan mentality: increasingly, his designs came to dwell on idealized panoramas of London or stupendous classical cityscapes which testify to the civilizing powers of monarchy. The 1634 masque, Carew's *Coelum Britannicum*, which moved from ruined buildings to a distant prospect of Windsor Castle presided over by Eternity, typifies this confident assertion of imperial renewal: so compelling is Charles's example that the gods are supposed to be reforming the heavens after the English model.

In view of the court's inglorious future, it is tempting to interpret these masques as Charles's wish-fulfilling exorcism of intractable political difficulties, a fantasy world into which he could retreat from reality. But this is to prejudge the issue; it is truer to see these masques as the necessary cultural counterpart to Charles's programme of government without parliamentary subsidy. Charles was seeking to survive by retrenching his finances, tightening up provincial discipline, and suspending military commitments, and his masques argued the case for peace, order, and withdrawal from a Europe torn by religious warfare. Of course Charles's masques encouraged him to take too sanguine a view of his political and financial resources, but for as long as his people continued to co-operate with his needs in government the masques were not so much escapism as images of what he thought he was capable of achieving. Moreover, the Caroline masque was no more monolithic than the Jacobean: King and Queen did not always see eye to eye on policy, and Henrietta Maria seems sometimes to have used her own court theatricals to promote French alliances against Spain.²¹ When the crisis finally loomed, Charles made one determined attempt to negotiate his position through revelry, and Davenant's *Salmacida Spolia* (1640) cast him as Philogenes, the Lover of his People who wished to conciliate his subjects, not to fight them. However, three of the masquers dancing with him were to fight him and four more were in opposition in the early months of the Long

²¹ See my 'Entertaining the Palatine prince: plays on foreign affairs 1635–37', *ELR* 13 (1983), 319–44; and my *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 25–54.



19 John Webb, groundplan for Davenant's *Salmacida Spolia*, 1640

Parliament: the loss of the possibilities for conciliation also marks the point at which the masques ceased to come altogether.²²

III

Outside the court, the major traditions of private and occasional playing took place at the Inns of Court and the universities. Both of these were revelling traditions, and almost all of the plays and masques performed in these environments were part of Christmas feasting. The importance of these environments goes beyond the rather mediocre plays that survive from them, as they were the formative milieux of the 'University Wits' on the one hand, and termier-dramatists such as Marston, Webster, Beaumont, and Ford on the other. Moreover, before the establishment of the commercial London playhouses, significant theatrical innovation took place under their auspices: the first English blank-verse tragedy (*Gorboduc*, 1562) was an Inns of Court

²² See my 'Politics and the masque: *Salmacida Spolia*' in T. Healy and J. Sawday, eds., *Literature and the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 59–74.

play, while the Cambridge melodrama *Richardus Tertius* (1579–80) is the earliest surviving English history play. After the coming of the commercial stages, the university and termier traditions ceased to be innovative, and even defined themselves in opposition to the professionals: a band of incompetent common players is ridiculed in Marston's Middle Temple play *Histrionmastix* (1598), and Burbage and Kemp among others are 'glorious vagabonds' who are earning undeserved fortunes by 'mouthing words that better wits have framed' in the Cambridge play *The Return from Parnassus, Part 2* (1603?). Unlike the court, which saw too many plays to retain an especially powerful consciousness of the uniqueness of the season,²³ these environments preserved a sense of seasonal revel which had continuity with medieval kinds of communal festivity. At Gray's Inn in 1594, a Christmas champion even entered the hall on horseback and rode around the hearth, which was placed in the middle of the room.²⁴

At the universities the custom of electing Christmas princes to preside over the collegiate revels, though provided for in some college statutes, had largely died out by the early seventeenth century. The last such prince of any importance reigned at St John's College, Oxford, during the 1607–8 Christmas, and five shows and two plays in Latin and three shows and three plays in English were mounted for his benefit.²⁵ Other opportunities for drama were provided by royal visits, for which entertainments had to be prepared to dispel the tedium of academic disputations. As James and Charles visited their universities more frequently than Elizabeth had done, this sort of stimulus was on the increase. James may have seen his first stage set in single-point perspective at Oxford in 1605, and he made a special trip to Cambridge in 1615 merely to see a repeat of George Ruggle's wildly successful Latin comedy *Ignoramus* (with its satire on a puritanical lawyer). Archbishop Laud used the royal visit to Oxford in 1636 as a showpiece for the reforms and patronage he had been lavishing on the university; one play, William Cartwright's *The Royal Slave*, was so admired that its scenes were carried down to Hampton Court for a second performance and Cartwright achieved a brief but interesting career as a semi-professional playwright. The members of Queens' College, Cambridge, were sufficiently committed to the theatre to build their own private playhouse in the 1630s.

However, the impact of college drama on the wider world was limited by the specialized nature of that drama. Much of it was in Latin (when

²³ But see R. C. Hassel, *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1979).

²⁴ See D. S. Bland, ed., *Gesta Grayorum* (Liverpool, 1968), p. 14.

²⁵ The manuscript is edited by F. S. Boas and W. W. Greg as *The Christmas Prince* (Malone Society, Oxford, 1923).

Elizabeth threatened a visit to Oxford in 1592, the Vice-Chancellor panicked because he had no English plays to show her)²⁶ and much was entrenched in fighting the obscure battles of civic and college politics. College plays tended to be poor imitations of Italian neo-classical comedy – all sundered families and intriguing pandars, what Milton witheringly described as young divines ‘writhing and unboning their clergy limbs to all the antic and dishonest gestures of Trinculoes, buffoons and bawds’²⁷ (he was thinking of Thomas Tomkis’s comedy *Albumazar* [1615]) – or they were staid moralities, of which Tomkis’s *Lingua* (1607), an allegory of the five senses, is easily the best. To pass muster with the college authorities, such plays had to be educational or chaste, and the prologue to *Lingua* emphasizes the play’s modest innocence; indeed, Oliver Cromwell himself is supposed to have acted in it (though the evidence is thin). Even when popular in style, their academic preoccupations prevented them from being populist.

Much the most interesting college dramas are the three ‘Parnassus’ plays, the third of which may be by the satirist Joseph Hall, and the plays of Thomas Randolph. *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* was performed at St John’s College, Cambridge, at Christmas 1598–9, and is a formulaic if amusing enough morality in the academic manner: Philomusus and Studioso are journeying to Parnassus (= Cambridge) and have to learn to avoid the twin temptations of Madido (poetic fury) and Stupido (puritanism). But between this and the two *Return from Parnassus* plays (*Part 1*, 1599–1600; *Part 2*, 1603?), the St John’s men caught up with the London vogue for snarling satire and humours comedy. The two *Returns* chronicle the future careers of the Cambridge students and reflect farcically but bitterly on graduate unemployment and the world’s neglect of merit. The students attempt to live, variously, as tutors, clerks, ministers, writers, balladeers, and hangers-on to rich patrons, but each comes to grief and is reduced to keeping sheep or writing satire. This scheme allows a panorama of scenes from the world of patronage, as well as coney-catching plots and extensive discussions and pastiche of contemporary poets (including Shakespeare). With their bitter perspective on a shiftless and hostile world, the *Returns* are very like two city comedies turned inside-out, with students rather than witty young gentlemen as the heroes, and simonists, undeserving patrons, and exploitative lawyers as the villains. There is a real conflict of attitudes here, as the students demand rewards from a world which they also despise; a combination of anxiety and wounded pride prevents their criticism from being (as it were) merely academic.

²⁶ Boas, *University Drama*, p. 323.

²⁷ From *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642). For the link with *Albumazar*, see Dick, *Albumazar*, pp. 54–5.

By far the most impressive academic playwright is Thomas Randolph (d. 1635), who was the one dramatist successfully to make the transition between college and professional stages. Randolph's handful of comedies take neo-classical forms but use them with theatrical competence and marry them to lively poetry, topical concerns, anti-Laudian jokes, and a healthy intellectual scepticism. His college career began with freshman's 'saltings' (parodies of academic disputations for performance at undergraduate initiations – a form which Randolph's Cambridge contemporary John Milton also attempted)²⁸ and culminated with *The Jealous Lovers*, staged before the court at Trinity College in 1632. Meanwhile in London Randolph had attached himself to the circle around Ben Jonson and become the first house playwright for the new boys' company at Salisbury Court: his *The Muses' Looking-Glass* (1630) celebrates the opening of the playhouse by conducting a defence of playgoing which amusingly convinces two puritans in the (stage) audience. Had Randolph lived beyond thirty, through him the academic drama might have again significantly influenced the professional stage.

The Inns of Court had a more immediate impact on the London playhouses, not least because the termers (or students) formed a considerable section of the regular audiences (Edward Heath, an Inner Templar of the 1620s, saw forty-nine plays in eighteen months alone).²⁹ The Inns brought together a unique constituency of gentlemen and aristocrats, many of whom were in residence as much for the acquirement of the social graces as for a proficiency in the law. Some were men who hoped to hold important government posts later in life, and the revels of the Inns have a quality of self-advertisement as well as political rehearsal. Others developed political interests through their legal studies: many future MPs worried about the expansion of the royal prerogative were here. Equally notable were the literary and intellectual interests of the termers, who seem to have developed an insatiable taste for satire, elegy, 'humours', and pastiche: a quality of avant-gardism attaches itself to their sports, which finds an echo in the parodic, sceptical, and sophisticatedly self-reflexive writing of the professional dramatists who emerged from the Inns (such as Webster and Marston). Finally, the Inns were also academies of manners and arenas for intense personal rivalries and competition that sometimes broke out into real violence. As the great contemporary lawyer John Fortescue described them, they were 'a sort of *Academy*, or *Gymnasium*, fit for persons of their station; where they learn singing, and all kinds of music, dancing, and such other accomplishments

²⁸ See R. Richek, 'Thomas Randolph's *Salting* (1627), its text, and John Milton's sixth prologue as another salting', *ELR* 12 (1982), 102–31.

²⁹ Prest, *The Inns of Court*, p. 155.

and diversions (which are called Revels) as are suitable to their quality, and such as are usually practised at Court'.³⁰

Revelling was an intrinsic part of the Inns' life. At the annual reader's Moot, a feast was held, after which stately traditional dances, called the 'measures', were danced by the whole Inn, from judges downwards, to be followed by livelier dances by the students. But the termers also held Christmas 'commons' (feasting and dicing) which, when prosecuted with sufficient enthusiasm, might turn into an elaborate and semi-serious public game. Several of these expensive revels were sustained under Elizabeth, James, and Charles, of which the most famous were the *Gesta Grayorum* of 1594–5; always they attracted crowds of genteel sightseers and involved processions through the city, even pageants on the Thames. In such revels, a Christmas prince would be elected who would take a title, appoint officers, and hold court very much as if he had real authority. At Gray's Inn in 1594–5, the Prince of Purpoole nominated an extensive household and processed pompously to the hall. Privy seals were sent out for the raising of finance, parliaments proclaimed, homage taken, and statutes promulgated. An ambassador was received from the Temple and solemn masques performed for him. When events went awry, a trial was held and the Privy Council reformed; an order of knighthood was instituted, and a progress to Russia performed. Such revels would involve the entire community in their enactment (Marston's Middle Temple play *Histrionmastix* (1598) calls for a cast of more than 120), though in post-Elizabethan Inns of Court masques, such as William Browne's *Ulysses and Circe* (1615) and Middleton's *The Masque of Heroes* (1619), professional players would be employed for the speaking parts, as happened at Whitehall.

The fascination of the termers' revels lies in their covert dialogue between jest and earnest. These were very much the pastimes of witty and precocious students on holiday from dry studies. In the Gray's Inn *Masque of Mountebanks* (1618), youthful knights magically imprisoned in the closet of Obscurity were rescued and brought out to dance; other revels repeatedly made fun of legal forms and jargon and involved the reading of interminable mock legal documents. They also specialized in rough and scatological humour about social behaviour, the courting of mistresses, the visiting of bawdy-houses and the like, and in a vein of cruel and sceptical parody. It has been plausibly suggested that Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, which was never 'clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar' (1607 preface), was designed for performance at the Inns of Court, and Jonson regarded *Every Man out of his Humour* as a play fitted to the termers and so dedicated it to them.

³⁰ Quoted in Green, *The Inns of Court and Early English Drama*, p. 33.

But, as is suggested by Jonson's dedication to 'the noblest nurseries of liberty and humanity in the kingdom', the termers' revels, for all their mocking of decorum, were understood to be essentially educational. The violent jokes work through an exploration of etiquette at once public and personal, while the elaborate parody of public political institutions was an opportunity for practising roles which one day some might aspire to play in earnest. The Prince of Purpoole presided over a council which debated in all seriousness the question of whether a prince were better to make war, pursue learning, build, get money, follow virtue, or revel; the author of these remarkable set-piece orations was none other than Francis Bacon. The late-contemporary historian of the profession, William Dugdale, claimed that termers did 'not only study the Laws, but [used] such other exercises as might make them the more serviceable to the King's court . . . so that these hostels [were] seminaries of the court'.³¹ One ambiguous aspect of this interaction between game and earnest was the homage that was done by 'real' political figures to the supposed authority of the Christmas king. Commonly noblemen would send him gifts in tribute, and the Lord Mayor would feast him; on such occasions the procession through the streets became a genuine part of London pageantry. When the Prince of Purpoole passed Greenwich by water, the Queen herself commanded a volley from the Tower for him; at Shrovetide, he took a masque to court and so truly became part of the revels of the real monarch. By 1598, the former Christmas prince was himself a Gentleman Pensioner to the Queen.

Inevitably, there was always a possibility that parody of royal forms might turn into genuine criticism. As periods of misrule, such games skirted collisions with the established authorities, and several times in the 1620s and 30s Christmas princes ran into trouble with the city and even with the King.³² But the political interests of the lawyers meant that the games could easily be made to carry advice, conciliation, or argument. I have already mentioned Dudley's use of the 1561 revels to bid for power: his games were safer than those of Serjeant Roo (1526–7), who was thrown in the Tower after a play that was taken as a lampoon on Cardinal Wolsey. In the Elizabethan period, plays associated with the Inns of Court tended to feature fictional kingdoms suffering from political division, or from an absence of heirs. *Gorboduc* (1562), *Jocasta* (1566), *Gismond of Salerne* (1567: written in part by the future Lord Chancellor, Christopher Hatton) and *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588: with contributions by Bacon) are interesting neo-classical experiments but can all be read on one level as contributions to the debates on the succession. Some of the shows from the *Gesta Grayorum* have been convincingly

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30. ³² See my 'Entertaining the Palatine prince', p. 327.

related to discussion of James's claim to the English throne: the masque of *Proteus and the Adamantine Rock*, which the termers took to court, reassured the Queen that, however powerful was the magnetic rock situated in the north, the hearts of loyal subjects were still drawn by the influence of Cynthia. Rather more foolhardy was the Middle Templar who in 1597–8 revelled under the name of Exophilus, 'in sawcy imitation of the great Earl' (that is, the court favourite Essex).³³

Under the early Stuarts, the divisions hinted at in Inns of Court revels were over matters of policy rather than succession. I have already described the implications of the lawyers' shows for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth; the following year, it was only with the utmost difficulty that Bacon got the Grayans to present *The Masque of Flowers* to the court favourite.³⁴ But the lawyers did not resume large-scale revelling until the 1630s, when there was considerable anxiety over the respect for law of Charles's administration. In James Shirley's *The Triumph of Peace* (1634), a prodigiously expensive masque presented to the court by all four Inns ostensibly as an apology for an affront done to the Queen by William Prynne of Lincoln's Inn, the lawyers used the antimasques to censure the monopolies on which Charles's finances depended and staged in the main masque a fable of the proper relations between Peace, Law, and Justice. Charles was warned that Peace cannot survive if Law is not upheld, and the parade through the streets that opened the evening underlined the political power of the lawyers. The following year, an entertainment at the Middle Temple for the exiled son of Princess Elizabeth advertised the lawyers' concern about England's European obligations; in *The Triumphs of the Prince D'Amour*, Davenant depicted them as enthusiastic for battle. The lawyers may have used courtly forms, but were by no means slaves to courtly attitudes. Charles would have done well to listen to their entertainments.³⁵

IV

While James and Charles withdrew from national visibility by restricting the number and range of their progresses, occasional drama in the provinces continued to be sustained in the great aristocratic palaces down to the Civil War. Indeed, it might be argued that this was the heyday of aristocratic theatricals: documentation or texts survive for well over a dozen early

³³ Axton, *The Queen's Two Bodies*, p. 3. Most of this paragraph is heavily dependent on Axton's study.

³⁴ Spencer and Wells, *A Book of Masques*, pp. 152–3.

³⁵ See my 'Entertaining the Palatine prince'; and 'Politics and the masque: *The Triumph of Peace*', *The Seventeenth Century* 2 (1987), 117–41.

Stuart provincial masques, yet they have never been properly studied as a genre. In all conscience, they are not terribly exciting: most were little family shows written by amateur poets such as Sir Thomas Salusbury or Mildmay Fane, the second Earl of Westmorland, and they tended to involve seasonal fables that welcome a member of the family to the house or celebrate the new year by providing an excuse for the entry of dancers. Unlike Elizabeth's progress entertainments, they were not staged publicly, and the speaking characters usually voiced a sense of local dignity and authority. The speaker was often the Lars Familiaris or the Household God or the Buttery Spirit.

And yet, like other private theatricals, the provincial drama provided a space for experimentation that was not available in the commercial theatre. Here we find not merely women dancers but women actors (as in *The Concealed Fancies*, 1644, by girls of the Cavendish family) – unknown on the professional stage before 1660 – and here too were small-scale experiments with scenery. These stages were also politically more adventurous, as they were patently beyond the reach of royal censorship. Mildmay Fane's *Candy Restored* (1640) included some hard talking about Ship Money and the absence of parliament, and it is remarkable that plays and masques were sponsored in the provinces by the family of the Earl of Essex, who was persona non grata at court and who has gone down historically as a puritanical nobleman (he fought for Parliament in the 1640s as General of Horse). There is more than a tinge of aristocratic radicalism about *The Masque at Coleorton* which Essex danced in 1617, with its Spenserian fable and praise of the Earl for his noble piety:³⁶

What thou art, continue still . . .
Live with heaven to make thy peace,
By thy virtues friends increase;
No faint hopes, nor fears at all:
If the world crack: Let it fall!

The masque censured swearing Cavaliers, lamented the decline of provincial hospitality, and celebrated local rural industry with an antimasque of dancing coalminers. The amateur plays of Essex's secretary, Arthur Wilson, also have a puritanical note and may well have been performed in the country.

³⁶ The text is printed (as *The Coleorton Masque*) in Lindley, ed., *Court Masques*, pp. 126–35. For commentary, see D. Norbrook, 'The reformation of the masque' in Lindley, *The Court Masque*, pp. 102–3. Margot Heinemann discusses Arthur Wilson in *Puritanism and Theatre*, pp. 221–4. On *Candy Restored*, see my *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 123. I attempt to clear some ground for the study of the provincial drama in 'A provincial masque of *Comus*, 1636', *RenD* n.s. 17 (1986), 149–73.

It is easy to see how, for a discouraged and disillusioned aristocrat, provincial theatricals might be a way of establishing one's alternative, superior court in the country.

The one provincial masque which no one would willingly let die is, of course, Milton's *Masque at Ludlow* (1634), misleadingly known as *Comus*. This was, in truth, a state occasion, as it was performed for the installation of the Earl of Bridgewater as President of the Council of the Marches and hence was part of Charles's campaign for tighter local discipline, yet, as we might expect, Milton's only masque constituted itself in important and telling ways in opposition to the norms of court drama. Milton's entertainment was less a masque than a cross between a masque and a provincial play: it concluded with general revels but began with a long acted fable in which the main masquers, the sons and daughter of the Earl of Bridgewater, took speaking parts, as they never could have done at court. If at court the silent masquers effortlessly displaced by their dancing the threats constituted by the antimasques, in Milton's revision of the form the masquers were denied precisely that privilege. They had to confront evil on its own ground, in the shape of the tempter *Comus* who assailed the children as they were lost in the genuinely dangerous woods around Ludlow. What for masquers at court was an easily assumed superiority was for Bridgewater's children a victory won by the skin of their teeth. They had heavenly aid in the shape of a Guardian Spirit (played by the great composer Henry Lawes), but his presence only underlined how remote heaven was, not promptly brought down, as in Charles's masques: the brothers called on the stars to unmuffle but the necessary scene-changes refused to happen. Indeed, the virtue that finally triumphs in this masque is something which was resistant to being projected in spectacular embodiment as it was at Whitehall: the Lady spoke of the Hope and Faith which sustained her by their presence within, but only she could see them, and they remained invisible to the audience. Charmed by *Comus* into immobility, she told him her mind was still free – but physically she was unable to rescue herself.

Comus, the villain, is in some senses a renegade from the world of court masquing, a figure who sums up the long tradition of royal revelry: his animal-headed dancers entered 'glistening' like court masquers (93 s.d.), and his description of the brothers as if they were godlike heroes, 'their port . . . more than human' (296), was patently insinuating flattery. The temptation he proposed was intemperance: he spoke for a world of pleasure, ease, revel, and indulgence which was uncomfortably close to the perception of Whitehall by those outside it. The Lady's crushing retort voiced an idea of social justice which repudiated the festival tradition very nearly in its entirety:

If every just man that now pines with want
 Had but a moderate and beseeing share
 Of that which lewdly-pampered Luxury
 Now heaps upon some few with vast excess,
 Nature's full blessings would be well-dispensed
 In unsuperfluous even proportion,
 And she no whit encumbered with her store,
 And then the Giver would be better thanked,
 His praise due paid, for swinish gluttony
 Ne'er looks to heaven amidst his gorgeous feast,
 But with besotted base ingratitude
 Crams, and blasphemes his Feeder. (768-79)

Milton may have been writing the finest single aristocratic masque, but his heroine spoke for an attitude that within a decade would have swept court revel aside for ever.

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Royal progresses and pageants

For royal progresses, there are two great treasure troves edited by the antiquary John Nichols: *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (2nd, expanded edition, 3 vols., 1823), and *The Progresses, Processions and Magnificent Festivities of James I* (4 vols., 1828). Nichols's volumes are currently being re-edited in a University of Warwick project under the direction of J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring. The roots of court pageantry are discussed by Gordon Kipling in *Enter the King: Theatre, Liturgy and Ritual in the Mediaeval Civic Triumph* (1998). Some of the Elizabethan pageants are described by David Bergeron in *English Civic Pageantry 1558–1642* (1971), and several are edited, with a substantial introduction, by Jean Wilson in *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (1980). Richard Dutton's volume of *Jacobean Civic Pageants* (1995) includes the pageantry for James's accession. *Summer's Last Will and Testament* is in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. R. B. McKerrow, rev. F. P. Wilson (5 vols., 1958), and *The Arraignment of Paris* is in *The Works of George Peele*, gen. ed. C. T. Prouty (3 vols., 1952–70). The standard edition of Lyly is still R. Warwick Bond's (3 vols., 1902), though the Revels Plays series now includes *Campaspe* and *Sappho and Phao* (ed. G. K. Hunter and David Bevington, 1990), and *Endymion* (ed. David Bevington, 1996). The best general study is by G. K. Hunter, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier* (1962); Lyly's court plays are intelligently explored by Philippa Berry in *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (1989).

The Stuart masque

Modern thinking about the Stuart masque begins with Stephen Orgel's *The Jonsonian Masque* (1965) and continues in his *The Illusion of Power* (1975). Orgel has also edited D. J. Gordon's seminal essays on masque iconography as *The Renaissance Imagination* (1975) and, with Roy Strong, has edited Inigo Jones's masque designs as *Inigo Jones: The Theatre of the Stuart Court* (2 vols., 1973). Jonson's masques appear, in old spelling, in vol. VII of *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, P. Simpson and E. Simpson (1941); they are available in modern spelling in Stephen Orgel's edition in the Yale *Ben Jonson* (1969). A new complete modernized edition is being prepared for *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (gen. eds. David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, 6 vols., forthcoming 2005). There are good selections of other masques in *A Book of Masques*, ed. T. J. B. Spencer and S. W. Wells (1968), and in *Court Masques*, ed. David Lindley (1995). *Songs and Dances for the Stuart Masque* are edited by Andrew Sabol (1959;

expanded, 1978). Peter Walls has written about *Music in the English Courtly Masque, 1604–1640* (1996), and the masques' visual and architectural aspects are treated in John Peacock's *The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones: The European Context* (1995). Two important collections of essays are edited by David Lindley, *The Court Masque* (1984), and by David Bevington and David Holbrook, *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque* (1998). For some masques long thought lost but recently re-discovered, see Timothy Raylor, *The Essex House Masque of 1621* (2000), and James Knowles's edition of Jonson's *Entertainment at Britain's Burse* (1609) in *Re-Presenting Ben Jonson: Text, History, Performance*, ed. Martin Butler (1999).

University and Inns of Court drama

On the universities, F. S. Boas's *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (1914), a remarkable scholarly achievement, is still standard. There is nothing equivalent for the Stuart period, though Alan H. Nelson has published an archaeological study of *Early Cambridge Theatres* (1994) and *The Three Parnassus Plays* are edited by J. B. Leishman (1949). The Inns of Court revels are studied by Marie Axton in *The Queen's Two Bodies* (above) and by P. J. Finkelpearl in *John Marston of the Middle Temple* (1969). The *Gesta Grayorum* are edited by D. S. Bland (1968).

5

MARGOT HEINEMANN

Political drama

I

THE political drama of the years 1580–1640 is essentially drama of a changing, troubled, and divided society. This does not mean we should think of it in terms of Roundheads and Cavaliers all the way, for the conflicts, tensions, and contradictions were far more complex than that. Upheavals of the kind seen in Britain and the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth century

may be conceived not as a simple substitution of one dominant class or economic system for another, but more broadly as a whole social organism outgrowing its skin. Any true revolution must be the response of an entire society, though not of all its members, to a novel situation pressing on it.¹

Different social groups then developed very different political ideas, and responded to the ‘novel situation’ in quite different ways. Conrad Russell formulated this in terms of a *double* revolution:

The English Civil War... was two revolutions... The first a rebellion rather than a revolution; it was not a social revolution, but a split in the governing class: a movement by a large number of peers and gentlemen to force a change of policy and a change of ministers on Charles I. The second revolution was a revolution in the full sense of the term: it was an assault on the existing social structure, and particularly on the position of the gentry... But, alas for simplicity... the two movements, though socially and ideologically quite distinct, always remained politically confused... We have then a political rebellion which was to a limited extent successful, and a social revolution which was almost totally unsuccessful.²

This can be a helpful way of thinking about the political conflicts articulated in the drama of the pre-revolutionary decades, which connect with the radical

¹ Victor Kiernan, ‘Revolution’ in Peter Burke, ed., *The New Cambridge Modern History, Companion Volume* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 226.

² Conrad Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War* (New York, 1973), p. 2.

revolution that failed as well as the propertied one that succeeded. The plays embody Utopias as well as practical political tactics, people's dreams of a more fulfilling life on earth and in heaven as well as immediate conflicts over taxation, foreign policy, or royal prerogative.

Fundamental changes in accepted ways of seeing the world and one's place in it take a long time to mature and to spread widely through society. Yet without such slow changes in mentalities over a long period the rapid transformations of the revolutionary years would have been unthinkable. Indeed the greatest political drama – *Richard II*, *King Lear* – often seems strangely to prefigure what was to become real material history a generation later.

Every new civilisation as such (however held back, attacked and fettered in every possible way) has always expressed itself in literary form before expressing itself in the life of the state. Indeed, its literary expression has been the means with which it has created the intellectual and moral conditions for its expression in the legislature and the state.³

If we understand this as a period 'between two worlds', we shall be less concerned to see all the plays as coherent embodiments of dominant attitudes in the society, or alternatively of subversive ones. We shall rather note the 'doubleness', the irreducible contradictions within outlooks and codes, which fascinated dramatists and audiences the more because they were problematic, newsworthy, and not easily resolved.

II

Political power rested with the monarch, who ruled as well as reigned. The king (or queen), governing with and through his Privy Council, not only controlled the distribution of office and favour, but also determined policy. The monarch's personal character and the company he kept were thus truly matters of deep concern to the people and not merely of curiosity. The naming of so many historical/political plays after the reigns of kings therefore makes more sense than might appear if we think of a monarch in modern terms, as a ceremonial figure or a tourist attraction.

It was nevertheless regarded as a mixed monarchy: the sovereign was King-in-Parliament rather than an absolute ruler. His royal prerogative gave him sole control over foreign policy and emergency action to preserve the state, and considerable authority over religion, but it was assumed that he would use his powers in accordance with ancient law and custom. However, the division between the king's prerogative and the common law was not clearly

³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Cultural Writings* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), p. 117.

defined by any written constitution – it was a ‘grey area’ open to tension and political dispute,⁴ as we often see in the plays, from *Gorboduc* (1562) and *Richard II* (1595) to Davenport’s *King John and Matilda* (1628).

Parliament too was a very different institution from what it is now, though (as plays like *Woodstock* suggest) it claimed the right from medieval times to be consulted whenever the king thought it necessary to raise extra money or to make war. The House of Commons was an elected assembly, where the wealthier gentry representing the counties sat alongside MPs from the boroughs, but it met only when summoned by the monarch and had limited powers. It was not a public forum either – reporting of its proceedings was forbidden (even though MPs did consult on issues with their constituents and contested elections were on the increase). Moreover there was no right of free speech in Parliament itself – indeed MPs might sometimes be arrested for what they said there.

The state machine was small as compared, say, with France; there were few full-time officers paid by the crown. Administration of law and order was carried on largely on a voluntary, amateur basis by the ruling élites, as part of their status and dignity – by the wealthier gentry appointed as JPs and Lords Lieutenant in the country, by elected corporations in the towns. At the centre, courtiers in high office were paid largely by what they could make out of their posts. Offices were bought as investments and regarded as property to be held for life: the profits came in as fees, fines, and bribes. What we would call corruption was not exceptional but normal; enormous fortunes were made out of the top posts, and courtiers were often rewarded with wardships or with monopolies and patents, all unpopular as burdens on trade.

Unlike contemporary monarchs in Europe the king had no standing army, and the private armies of great peers were becoming obsolete (though in Elizabethan times the very richest still retained their own cannon and fortified castles, and went to war partly at their own expense). The militia raised by the crown and the trained bands under the civic authorities were the main basis of defence. Sea war was partly run as private enterprise. Campaigns in Europe – increasingly expensive and underfunded because of the new weapons needed – were fought by a mixture of volunteers, mercenaries, and ill-trained, ill-fed, often irregularly paid levies pressed to make up the numbers. The wars looked less glorious to such men, and the stealing of their pay by their officers was a notorious political scandal (dramatically stressed in plays like *A Larum for London* [1599], *Edmund Ironside* [1595 or earlier], Dekker’s *If It Be not Good* [1611] and *Wonder of a Kingdom* [1631] and Heywood’s *Royal King and Loyal Subject* [1602]).

⁴ See Hirst, *Authority and Conflict*, chapter 2, ‘The body politic’.

Traditionally the monarch had been expected to 'live of his own', on the income from his lands and traditional feudal dues like customs, except in time of war. But inflation and sales of royal land made this more and more impossible, and the monarchy became (to its disgust) increasingly dependent on extra taxation which had to be voted by Parliament, and assessed and collected by local gentry, who systematically under-assessed themselves and placed the burden on lower ranks. Hence the many bitter disputes, from Elizabethan times on, about taxes, just and unjust, which so often figure in the drama, from *Edward IV* (1599) and *Woodstock* (1592?),⁵ through attacks on monopolies in city comedy, to Massinger's *Emperor of the East* (1631) and *King and the Subject* (1638) in the 1630s.

The consent and approval of the 'political nation' was thus of decisive importance in maintaining hierarchy and stability, given the limited powers of coercion possessed by the central state. Hence too the crucial role of the opinion-forming and sustaining aspects of the culture. Foremost of these was still the church, of which the monarchy, not the Pope, was now the head. Printed books, including the English Bible, played a growing part, especially in London, where a higher proportion of the people could read. Finally the drama, no longer controlled by the church or directly by the aristocracy, was a formative and potentially subversive influence.

Political drama in this period is not a distinctive genre, like tragicomedy or pastoral. Political plays are found in every form, though very different according to the theatre and the audience aimed at. Central are history plays, English or classical. But there are also topical news plays and political morality plays, reviving an older form for popular polemical effect (Robert Wilson, Thomas Dekker, much later Richard Brome). There are tragedies like *Massacre at Paris*, *King Lear*, *Sejanus*, where the mainspring of the action is clearly political; satirical comedies like Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass* or Massinger's *New Way to Pay Old Debts*; tragicomedies like *The Bondman* (1623), *The Swisser* (1631), *The Emperor of the East* (1631); or religious and political allegories spiced with contemporary mimicry of public personalities (*A Game at Chess*). Despite the censorship the theatre was shot through with politics at every level, from political court masques at one end to parody-bishops fighting with crosiers at the other, from select coterie performances for the court to the political street-pageants of the Lord Mayor's shows. I shall concentrate here on plays which seem to raise fundamental questions of political attitudes and ideas, and within that field on the political plays of the commercial theatres, whether fashionable or popular, indoor or outdoor.

⁵ For the case for a much later date see Mac Jackson, 'Shakespeare's *Richard II* and the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*', *MARDIE* 14 (2001), 17–65.

How far should we think of the dramatists and companies as deliberately intervening in contemporary politics? At one end of the spectrum, *Gorboduc* or the royal masques of Charles I's court, at the other *A Game of Chess* or the anti-prelatical amphitheatre plays of the 1630s were clearly designed to influence current ideas and political action by the crown, in parliament, or even in the streets. Plays like *A Larum for London* (before 1600) and *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (1590?) represent directly the dangers of peace and the need for military preparedness, in line with the policy of the 'war party' of Leicester, Walsingham, and later of the Essex circle. Dekker's *Whore of Babylon* (1606) and Barnabe Barnes's *The Devil's Charter* (1606) are fierce, even bigoted reactions to Gunpowder Plot – with angels on one side, devils on the other, and a clear (if today unacceptable) immediate political conclusion to be drawn by the audience. Again, since there were no newspapers or documentaries, the companies sometimes filled the slot with representations of topical events.

However, 'political drama' has to be understood as a much wider thing than that. It is difficult to define because there is so much of it. Psychological interest is indeed a later development. The major drama grew out of forms concerned primarily with public, communal events and actions – pageants, civic and village festivities, royal offerings, Lords of Misrule with their ritual reversals of order. Drama of domestic or personal life does exist, but as yet on a more limited scale.

A powerful influence on the political dramatist was the nature of the audience – or audiences. The traditions of Lollardy, popular anti-clericalism and religious radicalism went back long before the Reformation, especially in London and the south-east, and the highly profitable audiences there were probably more strongly nationalist, anti-Popery, anti-Spanish and anticlerical than either the monarchy or the government, as was shown in public opposition to the Alençon marriage for Elizabeth at one end of the great period of the drama, or the tumults over a Spanish marriage for Prince Charles at the other.⁶

However, the most important thing about the audience was its broad social and political mix. No doubt the leisured and well-to-do had the opportunity to go to the theatre more often than the craftsman or the labourer. But it does not follow that London playgoers as a whole were the 'privileged' in society.⁷ Careful study of the evidence (by Andrew Gurr and Martin Butler

⁶ For popular anti-Catholic feeling, see Robin Clifton, 'Fear of Popery' in Russell, ed., *The Origins of the English Civil War*, pp. 144–67.

⁷ This was argued by Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1576–1642* (Princeton, N.J., 1981).

in particular)⁸ confirms what the plays themselves always suggested, that the audiences for the various kinds of public theatres included more or less everyone except the very poorest. Neither were they all ‘anti-puritan’ in their opinions, as used to be assumed – unless indeed opposition to the theatre is taken to be the sole definition of puritanism (which would make many orthodox bishops into puritans). Indeed, much city opposition to the theatres was due to fear of disorderly crowds, or infection by plague, or absenteeism from work rather than a principled objection to acting as such.

Imposed by royal proclamation as part of the royal prerogative, censorship and control were exercised through the Master of the Revels, a court official who arranged court entertainments, licensed companies and playhouses, and had to read and approve all plays before they were staged, sometimes refusing to pass them unless changes were made, and taking a handsome fee for his trouble. Printed plays came under the separate censorship of printed books controlled by the Archbishop of Canterbury and the ecclesiastical authorities, which was often stricter in demanding cuts and changes, and was enforced through the Stationers’ Company, a state-licensed monopoly, which wielded the power in the last resort to destroy presses or deprive offending printers of their livelihood. Even after a play had been properly licensed the Privy Council might still intervene to suppress it, and to question, punish, or imprison the dramatist or the company.⁹ Since to obtain the right to act at all the companies were required to have a noble patron whose servants they nominally were, a serious clash with the censorship could also lead to loss of patronage and of livelihood.

Suppression was erratic and unpredictable. In quiet times the censor might let a good deal pass (and was probably paid extra fees to do so). But in times of political tension, such as the late 1590s, the first years of James’s reign, the early 1620s and the 1630s, government and censors would turn much more touchy and severe. And there is no doubt that they tended to become more repressive over the fifty years before the Civil War, as Sir Henry Herbert recognized when he decided that all old plays must be relicensed, since ‘they may be full of offensive matter against Church and State, the rather that in past times the poets took greater liberty than is allowed them by me’.¹⁰

⁸ Gurr, *Playgoing*; Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, appendix 11.

⁹ The Privy Council thus intervened to interrogate Shakespeare’s company over *Richard II*, Jonson over *Eastward Ho!*, *Sejanus*, and *The Magnetic Lady*, Daniel over *Philotas* and Day’s *Isle of Gulls*, and Middleton and his company over *A Game at Chess*; see Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship, and Authorship in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, 2000).

¹⁰ J. Quincy Adams, ed., *Dramatic Records of Sir Henry Herbert* (New Haven, Conn., 1917), p. 21.

In an administration where offices were run for the profit of the officeholder, fees and gifts must often have determined whether a production was allowed or not: and the Master of the Revels might also be influenced by the family or faction to which he belonged. Persecuting archbishops like Whitgift and Bancroft ran a tougher censorship, at least against puritanism and nonconformity, than the puritan-sympathizing Abbot who succeeded in 1610. When Abbot was sequestered from his office and finally replaced by Laud, another persecutor of the radicals, political censorship became heavier and the penalties for offenders much more brutal and violent. This helps to explain how so much critical political theatre got through despite the limits placed on it by the state, while other plays, apparently no more extreme in their attitudes, were suppressed. Staging an obviously political play must always have been a calculated risk.

We know of a number of cases where the companies and writers collided directly with the censorship. Almost every dramatist of importance was involved at some time or other – Marlowe, Shakespeare, Jonson, Daniel, Day, Chapman, Middleton, Massinger, Brome, for a start. But the effects went far beyond such specific cases. As G. E. Bentley showed, while only a small number of the 2,000 or more plays produced in the fifty years before the Civil War directly offended, all managers and dramatists knew that severe punishments and loss of livelihood were within the censor's power.

The inhibitions which such knowledge provided are not difficult to imagine. They affected what the professional dramatist wrote for the companies; they affected what the managers and the sharing members were willing to accept; and they affected what the book-keeper did to the MS as he worked on the prompt-copy and the players' sides [parts].¹¹

The 1590s was a decade of extreme hardship for the poor, with bad harvests and famine years, and an outcry against corn-hoarders and price-raisers. In the south-east, notably in Essex and Oxfordshire, there were grain riots, and in London itself riots for cheaper bread and against aliens, who were thought to be taking trade away from local people. These were issues too dangerous for popular literature and theatre to be allowed to treat freely at this moment. Accordingly, the manuscript play of *Sir Thomas More* (by Munday, Chettle, and others, to which Shakespeare probably contributed the scene where More persuades the rioters to return to order) was marked by the censor 'leave out the insurrection wholly and the cause thereof'. So gutted, the play perished and was probably never staged. However

¹¹ G. E. Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time* (Princeton, N.J., 1971), p. 196.

orthodox the moral drawn by the playwrights from such turbulent protests (and there is no suggestion that any of them *support* rioting), merely to show this kind of mass action with any sympathy or detachment, or to suggest that the aggrieved people should be leniently treated, could be asking for trouble.

Our own view of political theatre is also skewed because unorthodox or dangerous plays, even if they reached the stage, often remained unprinted. Some of the most controversial political plays we know of have survived only in manuscript, for example *Woodstock*, *Sir Thomas More*, *Edmund Ironside*, *Sir John Van Olden Barnavelt*, *Believe As You List*. Many others which were probably radical have not survived at all except as titles – including many 1590s history plays; much of the propaganda urging English support of the Protestant cause in the 1620s and 1630s; and the popular anti-bishop and anti-monopolist farces of the 1630s, whose existence is known to us only from the records of their suppression.

Work by, for example, Martin Butler and Annabel Patterson¹² has shown how some meaningful political drama could be produced in the interstices of state control and repression even in the 1630s, often by using theatrical metaphors to translate political conflicts into sexual terms, or by ‘ambiguity’ about topical references, or by providing reassuringly happy endings to conflicts which in life were proving insoluble. However, the ‘hermeneutics of censorship’, as Patterson calls it, had its price. In many cases only an informed in-group could understand and interpret the ‘code’. Wide political appeal to a popular audience was largely excluded (which was of course the object). The *emotional* impact of the political action was often altered or blunted, and many central issues could not be treated at all. ‘Consensus’ was thus largely, much more than has been realized, a product of censorship and self-censorship (though it is always possible that what writers are not allowed to say they may in time cease to think). And this must have helped to alienate many people from the theatres and their playwrights as merely ‘royal slaves’.

One direct consequence of the Reformation had been the transfer of much of the land, wealth, power, and patronage of the church to the monarchy and its supporting aristocracy and gentry (and often through them by resale to city grandees). Among those whose families were thus enriched were several of the greatest patrons of poets and players, the Dudleys, Earls of Leicester and Warwick (patrons of radical Protestantism from the 1540s); the Walsinghams; the Sidneys; the Herberts, Earls of Pembroke; the

¹² Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*; Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation: The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Madison, Wis., 1984).

Devereux, Earls of Essex; the Rich family; the Russells, Earls of Bedford. Under Elizabeth their wealth and influence helped to patronize and protect a spectacular secular culture. To offer entertainment to the Queen was indeed a necessary investment in their world, and this they did at first through their own troupes of players. Many later became patrons of the new theatrical companies, as well as of preachers whom they appointed to livings in their gift or as private chaplains.

In political and religious terms many of these patrons inclined to a militant Protestantism which on a broad definition could be called 'puritan', supporting, for example, a strongly anti-Spanish, anti-Catholic foreign policy (about which the Queen had reservations), in opposition to the more conservative and largely Catholic Howard family; limitation of the power and wealth of the English church and hence support of those who wanted to carry reformation further; aid for the Netherlands revolt and for the Huguenots against sovereigns who they considered had become tyrants in religion, but without countenancing rebellion independently by the lower orders. Here again they diverged from the ruling attitudes of both Elizabeth and James I, who saw the Dutch as rebels against their lawful sovereign and dangerous republicans, and were unwilling to commit themselves to consistent support of the Netherlands against Spain.

Certainly there was a clear economic and power basis for these aristocratic attitudes – the huge vested interest in retaining former church lands; business links with the advancing merchant and commercial groups (notably in mining and in overseas trade, piracy, and colonization); fear of a centralization and absolutist control which threatened the remnants of the nobility's feudal-style authority and independent power. But ideas and faith came into it too. For many – notably Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville – there was a strong ideological and intellectual commitment as well as a factional one, reinforced by personal links with Huguenot thinkers like Sidney's friends Languet and Mornay, with advanced heretical philosophers like Giordano Bruno, and with organizers of nonconformist and presbyterian groups in England like Leicester's protégé John Field. Such religious and political ideas gave rise to heroic dreams of a new world worth living and dying for.¹³ In England, as in the Netherlands, an important if paradoxical contribution to the political and religious revolution was made by 'blue blood, more inflammable and readier to run risks, to gamble with life and fortune rather than to lose face, drawing on the more cautious money-men', as Victor Kiernan puts it.

¹³ For this trend within the aristocratic élite see David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance* (London, 1984).

III

The plays of the first permanent commercial theatres in the 1580s represent both controversial political issues and the common people's grievances in a way that seems extraordinarily bold and direct compared with what came later. Raw nationalism, warlike monarchism, anticlericalism, fear of Catholic invasion and plotting, already present in the popular audience, are appealed to and emotionally reinforced in early chronicle plays like Peele's *Edward I* (1591) or the anonymous *Edmund Ironside*, each with a warrior-king as hero, threatened by the treachery of demonic Spanish queen or Pope-serving archbishop. The same sense of national pride and foreign menace permeates the 'medleys', a mixture of older forms, part pageant, part morality play, part clowning and political cabaret, starring the famous comics Richard Tarlton and William Kemp and scripted for them by Robert Wilson. This, as David Bevington says, was part of 'the milieu from which the Shakespearean history plays evolved'.¹⁴

The early professional companies were closely associated with Leicester and Walsingham, leaders of the puritan group on the Privy Council, who first established the Queen's Men as an élite troupe. The tone of their plays may well reflect not only audience taste but also the bid of these statesmen to rouse popular feeling through their patronage for a militant Protestant policy. Tarlton, Kemp, and Wilson were all members of Leicester's Men, and went with him on his Netherlands military expedition in 1585 to take part in the magnificent pageants and entertainments designed to raise his status there (near-royal displays, aimed partly to win radical support, which gave great offence to the Queen).¹⁵ Marlowe, too, had been employed by Walsingham in anti-Catholic espionage and counter-espionage in Europe.

Tarlton, a favourite with all social classes and privileged because he could always make the great laugh, seems to have been very much a political comic, using his protective fooling on occasion to parody the corruption of power in church and state, and sometimes in trouble with courtiers for doing so.¹⁶ More than anyone else he kept up the tradition of direct address to the audience (as in later music-hall) and of 'clowns thrust in to play a part in majestic matters' criticized by Sidney – the unclassical, alienating style which

¹⁴ Bevington, *Tudor Drama*, p. 191.

¹⁵ Sidney stood godfather to Tarlton's son, and after he was killed Tarlton appealed to Walsingham on his own deathbed to protect this child. See also R. C. Strong and A. Van Dorsten, *Leicester's Triumph* (London and Oxford, 1964).

¹⁶ The 'Play of the Cards' which Sir John Harington says caused offence to certain courtiers may well have been one of those scripted by Wilson for Tarlton. Walsingham apparently defended it on the grounds that 'they that do that they should not, shall hear that they would not'.

gives late-Elizabethan political drama its two-eyed, cross-class, stereoscopic quality. In his russet countryman's jacket and baggy trousers, drumming, dancing, and singing popular songs, he was an outsize plebeian stage personality quite apart from any particular plays he appeared in, often stepping out of the play to improvise direct to the audience. His line was not that of the quick-witted devil – Vice of the morality plays, but rather the simple but shrewd 'little man', pushed around by authority yet always bouncing back – a sympathetic persona not unlike that of Charlie Chaplin, another much-loved baggy-trousered entertainer likewise inclined to political radicalism.

In Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* (early 1580s), Tarlton as the comic countryman Simplicity shrewdly detects the four 'knaves of the pack', Fraud, Dissimulation, Usury, and Simony, who operate in the mercenary city ruled by Lady Lucre; but he can never get the better of them. Usury, whom he exposes as a swindler of the poor, continues to trade respectably at the Royal Exchange, while Simony, the corrupt churchman, is placed by rich Lady Lucre in charge of 'such matters as are ecclesiastical', on the grounds that he is a 'sly fellow' with a 'liberal tongue'. He is last heard of at St Paul's, 'very familiar with some of the clergy'.

Considered as a patriotic entertainment to honour the Armada victory and the national unity that won it, Robert Wilson's play *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (c. 1590, printed 1594) is remarkable for the emotional power with which it represents a national *disunity* that almost allows foreign invasion to succeed. The action takes place on two levels – the gods in heaven, where Mercury and Mars finally triumph over Lust and Contempt, and the earthly kingdom of Boeotia, where grasping, traitorous Courtier and greedy, enclosing Landlord gleefully describe (in the manner of earlier estates satire) how ruthlessly they exploit the people, whom Scholar (absorbed in decadent courtly arts) and powerless Soldier have failed to protect. The country is saved only thanks to Ralph the Cobbler, a poor man given the gift of prophecy by the gods, who takes over what ought to be Scholar's function and warns the nation of its danger and the coming Day of Judgement.

These plays, then, deliberately rough and populist and sometimes bigoted as they are, show how the survivals of folk-comedy, with their images of 'misrule' and the world upside-down, often seen only as a 'carnavalesque' outburst of anarchic feeling against *all* restraining powers, could also be used for more specific political purposes.¹⁷ But the particular balance between popular monarchism and powerful patronage that made such performances

¹⁷ Wilson was himself not a naïve traditional showman but an educated and sophisticated writer, who later collaborated with Drayton and Munday in Protestant history plays like *Sir John Oldcastle*.

possible around the Armada period came to an end, as the rulers' fear of popular disorder and religious radicalism intensified in the economic crisis of the 1590s. Leicester, Walsingham, and Warwick died, and Whitgift's censorship and thought-control extended to puritan as well as Catholic deviance. Moreover, we know that Marprelate scandalized mainstream puritans like Cartwright (even though the avant-garde courtier Essex might boast of reading him) and so may the related plays have done. These dramatic forms were in any case going out of fashion. The history plays of the 1590s marked a new, more complex kind of political drama, but the older feelings re-emerge in their nationalism, their military heroes and what Bevington calls the 'staple anticlericalism' of Shakespeare's history plays.

IV

The main form of political drama in the 1590s was the English history play, making the past accessible for thousands who would never read the bulky chronicles of Hall, Holinshed, Stow, or Foxe. It appealed to the audience's intense interest in history as such, but also to their anxieties, resentments, and grievances about current politics. Fusing the popular dramatic tradition with new humanist or 'politique' history and argument, it helped both to create a consensus of support for a powerful monarchy and, paradoxically, to undermine it.

History provided a mass of exciting and stageable stories, and the popular battle scenes, sieges, military heroes, and pageantry that helped to sustain patriotic feeling and loyalty to the monarch in time of war. But it also showed the precedents and customs by which the powers of royal government were set and limited – precedents to which common lawyers and Members of Parliament continually referred to define the 'ancient liberties' and traditional rights of aristocrats, freemen, and citizens, which might be threatened by growing royal absolutism.¹⁸ The past could offer political lessons to the present, and dangers and disasters from earlier times could be seen as analogous to contemporary troubles which, given the censorship, could not have been presented directly. Indeed even plays not intended to suggest topical analogies might acquire them through some new turn of events.

The selection and adaptation the dramatists made from the often shapeless chronicle material aimed both to give an impression of the past and its conflicts as they actually happened (including the best-known stories and legends familiar from ballads and folk-plays, which, as Brecht said, would

¹⁸ See Edna Zwick Boris, *Shakespeare's English Kings, the People and the Law* (Rutherford, N.J., 1978).

have been missed if they had been left out) and, inevitably, to place the audience in the position of weighing and judging the action. The resulting 'demystification' of the mystery of state, rather than the suggestion of alternative solutions to largely insoluble problems, was the truly instructive and potentially subversive aspect of these plays. Thus at the climax of *Richard II*, when the King is about to be deposed, the Bishop of Carlisle, a divine-right absolutist, appeals to Parliament:

What subject can give sentence on his king,
And who sits here that is not Richard's subject?

(4.1.121-2)

The dramatic question is posed not only to the stage audience but at the same time to the 3,000 spectators in the theatre, subjects asked to judge the deposing of a king. Right or wrong, the audience is forced to *think* about the political ideas involved as it watches the crown held between two rivals. It is not the answer but the question that subverts. The drama gives people images to think with, and thus reinforces confidence in their own ability to understand and discuss conflicts of state.

However, it is too easy to assume, as some critics have done, that staging these royal rituals necessarily helped to reinforce acceptance and deference for the existing hierarchic order,¹⁹ for the theatrical spectacles, at least in the earlier years, were seldom uncritical representations serving the mythology of the monarch's semi-divine status. More often than not, in the popular theatres, the splendour is distanced, shown as threatened, hypocritical, or hollow. Unlike coronations and royal weddings presented live on TV, these shows usually have a built-in alienating commentary. The stately rhetoric of court scenes (say, the openings of *King John* [1596], *Richard II*, *King Lear* [1605], even *The Maid's Tragedy* [1610]) is continually undercut by cynical colloquial asides and soliloquies or by contrasting naturalistic scenes, revealing the grim realities of the power-game and the competition in flattery.²⁰ *Richard III* (1593) makes clear how royal spectacles are deliberately constructed, when Richard appears before the London crowd on a balcony 'betwixt two clergymen', to be greeted with prearranged cheers from the terrorized citizens.

Only a very inattentive audience could receive all this as confirming the majesty of power. Stephen Orgel has indeed argued, more convincingly, that by the last two decades of Elizabeth's reign 'a strong sense of impatience and disillusion in the royal mythology was being felt... and its rhetoric was

¹⁹ On this point my emphasis differs from that of Stephen Greenblatt (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, p. 253).

²⁰ See *King John*, 1.1 and 2.1; *Richard II*, 1.1 and 1.2; *King Lear*, 1.1; *Maid's Tragedy*, 1.2.

adopted only by those who had a vested interest in mirroring her self-image'. To mime the monarch was, he thought, 'a potentially revolutionary act'.²¹

Insofar as the political drama of the 1590s brings out the value of a strong monarchy, the case is based primarily on the secular pragmatic need for unity between king, nobility, city, and commons to maintain order against popular rebellion and defend England against invasion or change in religion. The providential pattern of sacred dynastic succession and divinely ordered hierarchy, which E. M. W. Tillyard²² saw as a universally accepted belief common to the playwrights and their audience, is much more evident in the older chronicle sources and the official homilies than it is in the plays themselves, where the cause and effect of historical events is increasingly firmly centred in human choices and human actions. The argument for supporting the king – even an unsatisfactory king, or one whose title to the throne is spurious – is the fear of civil war as the alternative, and even that is not automatically ruled out as unthinkable wickedness. Prophecies, dreams, and ghosts may influence the audience's moral attitude to the action (in *Richard III* or *Woodstock* for example), but do not determine its course. Comments on political events are usually those of various human characters, not of the author, and the audience retains the right to judge between them.

Indeed the same chronicles could and did serve as raw material either for 'providential' drama such as the 'Elect Nation' plays (see below) or for frankly 'politique' writers like Sir John Hayward or Sir Henry Wotton, who treated history as a guide to practical statecraft and political wisdom.²³ Both of these last, as it happens, were members of the Essex circle, which included the recent Oxford translators of Tacitus, and the main proponents of a more scientific, accurate, less moralistic history in the manner of Tacitus, Guicciardini, and Machiavelli – men like Wotton, Fulke Greville, Francis Bacon, and the ill-starred Henry Cuffe, Oxford professor of Greek, later secretary to Essex, who taught political theory to Shakespeare's patron the Earl of Southampton. Shakespeare too can be seen as a politic historian working in the field of drama, showing providence as acting only through secondary causes: that is, through human behaviour.²⁴

Rather than simply restaging the doctrine of the official *Homily Against Disobedience* (1570), that rebellion even against a tyrant is always the

²¹ 'Making greatness familiar' in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Forms of Power and the Power of Forms in the Renaissance* (Norman, Okla., 1982), pp. 41–8.

²² *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, 1943); *Shakespeare's History Plays* (London, 1944).

²³ See F. J. Levy, 'Hayward, Daniel and the beginnings of politic history in England', *HLQ* 50 (1987), 1–34.

²⁴ See F. J. Levy, *Tudor Historical Thought* (San Marino, Calif., 1967), chapter 7.

greatest of sins against God, the plays openly represent the dilemma of subjects under a bad or inadequate king. Shakespeare's King John, for example, is not even a legitimate king but a usurper, as we learn in the first scene (1.1.40–3). He is presented as neither a good, nor a just, nor a strong monarch. He is not to be personally relied on to defend England, whether against the French or the Papal legate (to whom he shamefully kneels); he is shown as an irresponsible gambler and an ineffective and capricious war leader, and gives orders for the murder of the child Arthur, who seems to have the strongest dynastic claim to the throne. It is John's nephew, bastard son of Richard Coeur de Lion, with no legitimate claim to the throne at all, who exposes the unscrupulous double-dealing of the kings and stands out as the brave, iconoclastic, sceptical royal leader with whom the audience is likely to identify.

The non-Shakespearian chronicle plays too are monarchist and Erastian in feeling; they assume that a strong king, prepared to take sensible advice and stand up to factious nobles or bishops, offers the best hope of justice and prosperity for the commons. But the sacredness and divine right of monarchy and hierarchy is again less to the point than its practical usefulness. Thus in Heywood's 1 *Edward IV*, Hobs the tanner, a plebeian speaking freely to the disguised King Edward, frankly refuses to judge who is the rightful king.²⁵

I am just akin to Sutton Windmill, I can grind which way the wind blows. If it be Harry, I can say, well fare Lancaster. If it be Edward, I can sing, York, York, for my money.

(*Dramatic Works*, vol. 1, p. 45)

He loves the king, he says,

as poor folks love holidays, glad to have them now and then; but to have them come too often will undo them. So, to see the king now and then 'tis comfort; but every day would beggar us; and I may say to thee, we fear we shall be troubled to lend him money; for we doubt he's but needy.

What concerns him is that taxes should not be too heavy; that the king, whoever he is, should temper justice with mercy; and that he should not corruptly burden the people to enrich the few:

Those that have [patents] do as the priests did in old time, buy and sell the sins of the people. So they make the king believe they mend what's amiss, and for money they make the thing worse than it is . . . Faith, 'tis pity that one subject should have in his hand that might do good to many through the land.

(p. 46)

²⁵ On this scene, and the wider use of the folk-motif of the commoner speaking directly to the king, see Anne Barton, 'The king disguised: Shakespeare's *Henry V* and the comical history' in Joseph Price, ed., *The Triple Bond* (University Park, Penn., 1975).

Concern over the rights and limits of royal power and the danger of absolutism is most sharply dramatized in the reigns of kings who got deposed by their subjects, the traditionally bad and weak monarchs, Edward II and Richard II. A right of resistance to tyrants had long been argued in principle by Huguenot, Dutch, and Marian exile writers, who held that rebellion and even tyrannicide might sometimes be justified, especially in the case of religious oppression, provided the revolt was led by 'inferior magistrates' (the nobility) and not by the multitude on its own. Although books setting out such views were suppressed and burned by the hangman, the ideas were well known, if not necessarily accepted, among the 'natural rulers'. Nevertheless, in Elizabethan times the *right* of resistance was generally regarded as a Popish doctrine, put forward by the Jesuits to justify plotting against the Queen, and it is seldom articulated in the plays, while republicanism as an alternative to a bad king is never an issue. The orthodox doctrine that even a bad monarch must be obeyed is not questioned in words so much as in the action; for clearly there is a point beyond which in practice subjects do not obey but revolt, often with great damage to the commonwealth. Marlowe, Shakespeare, and the anonymous author of *Woodstock* all dramatize this situation.

Marlowe's *Edward II* is political in an iconoclastic sense, showing the reign and deposition as a naked power-struggle between the king and the barons. The country is torn apart and its armies defeated by the Scots. Yet it is deliberately made difficult for the audience to identify morally or humanly with either side. Sympathy and antipathy for the King and his enemies are continually shifted about. This murderous detachment and rejection of easy moralistic patterns was partly what attracted Brecht to the play not long after the First World War.

Edward is shown as a disastrous king because he is given up to self-indulgence and manipulated by his favourites, and therefore unable to control his feuding barons or make war effectively. The decisive issue is not his homosexuality (though that antagonizes the barons, and probably the audience, they admit that 'the greatest kings have 'had their minions'), but that it leads him to favour social upstarts and squander wealth on them. The play never sentimentalizes his homosexual love-affairs. On his side there is real infatuation and love for Gaveston, but the very first scene shows Gaveston himself as an ambitious social climber, using his charm to 'draw the pliant king which way I please' (1.1.53), refusing to employ honest men, but instead devising an expensive, elegant court culture – 'Italian masques by night, / Sweet speeches, comedies and pleasing shows' (55–6) – anachronistically resembling the masking and opulence of the Elizabethan court. Spencer and Baldock, who succeed him, are equally unscrupulous.

Richard II was an even more disturbing figure. He had, after all, been publicly deposed in Parliament, and succeeded not by his son but by a new usurping dynasty: and yet the sky had not fallen, the usurper had died in his bed. Richard's reign was indeed proverbial for misgovernment long before the dramatists used it, and was often cited as a precedent in political argument right up to the Civil War.²⁶

The anonymous *Woodstock*, covering the early part of Richard's reign though drastically altering the history, is in some ways the boldest and most subversive of all Elizabethan historical plays. The young King is seen as seduced by greedy, frivolous courtiers to dismiss his noble Council, ride roughshod over Parliament, and extort taxes from the people to feed the luxury of his court. The dispute is imaged (more consistently than in *Edward II*) in terms of luxurious courtly fashion against country plainness. Unlike *Edward II*, the play highlights the grievances of the common people, especially the burdens of increased taxation and tax-farming (which was also much resented in the 1590s). This is rendered less risky politically by making the popular spokesman not a commoner (like the hero of *Jack Straw*, or Shakespeare's Jack Cade in 2 *Henry VI*), but the King's uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, a heroic nobleman with old-fashioned values expressed in simple dress and plainness of speech, whose desire is only to calm and head off a revolt of the angry commons – a figure wholly unhistorical (the Woodstock of the chronicles was a turbulent war-lord), but dramatically effective. The conflict of loyalty and conscience is thus symbolized not in a minor character like Marlowe's Kent, but at the centre of the drama. Under great provocation Woodstock remains loyal to the orthodox doctrine that a tyrant must be endured as a divine visitation, and dies a martyr to it: but the play finds so much justification for the rebellion led by the Council after his death that it is 'rather a challenge to orthodoxy than a confirmation of it'.²⁷

Shakespeare's *Richard II* has sometimes been regarded as a more politically orthodox remake of *Woodstock*.²⁸ But although it attends less to the hardships of the commons, the play does not in fact present royal absolutism in a more favourable light. Here Richard is made directly responsible and

²⁶ For example Sir Francis Knollys, puritan privy councillor and Leicester's father-in-law, described those who favoured the Anjou Catholic marriage for Elizabeth in 1578 as 'King Richard the Second's men'. Among later parliamentarians, Oliver St John in 1615, Henry Parker in 1642, Colonel Rainborough in 1647, and Milton in 1649 all referred to Richard's tyranny and his overthrow as a precedent. (See M. Heinemann, 'Shakespeare und die Zensur' in *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* [Weimar, 1985], pp. 81–2.)

²⁷ William A. Armstrong, *Elizabethan History Plays* (London, 1965), p. xi.

²⁸ See Giorgio Melchiori, 'The corridors of history: Shakespeare the remaker', British Academy Lecture, 1986.

his flatterers are reduced to mere 'feed' roles. Attempts to read *Richard II* as a simple vindication of divine right and the wickedness of all resistance do not square with the dramatic effect of the play, nor with the way Shakespeare used and modified the chronicle sources to produce a painful, agonizing conflict in the mind of the audience. What happens when kingly power rests in the hands of a corrupt or lawless ruler? Is there ever a right of resistance? Or is that always the greater evil because of the lasting divisions it causes?

In the first part of the play Shakespeare makes Richard wholly unsympathetic, devious, and unscrupulous, and to emphasize this invents a highly sympathetic John of Gaunt (again largely unhistorical), a patriotic elder statesman who, though outraged by his brother Woodstock's murder and by the farming of the realm to favourites, nevertheless 'may never lift / An angry arm against [God's] minister' (1.2.40–1). When Richard abuses and insults Gaunt on his deathbed, and then seizes his property and disinherits his heir Bolingbroke to finance his Irish wars, he undermines his own hereditary right and prepares the way for his own fall. The play concentrates on the property issues (which J. H. Hexter thinks would appeal not only to the hereditary aristocracy, but to contemporary citizen resentments in the 1590s about the infringement of their craft and trading rights by royal monopolies and patents).²⁹ Richard has made himself landlord of England rather than king,³⁰ and alienated his people:

The commons hath he pill'd with grievous taxes
And quite lost their hearts: the nobles hath he fin'd
For ancient quarrels and quite lost their hearts.

(2.1.246–8)

One formerly influential but sentimental reading tried to make Richard a sacred and even Christ-like figure in the latter part of the play. There is, however, no warrant for this in the text. Sympathy is aroused for the impossible dilemma facing Richard's subjects and for the personal sufferings of the man after deposition, not for a royal martyr (even if that is how he sees himself).

Indeed it cannot have been clear to an Elizabethan audience that Richard's overthrow was necessarily the worst outcome for England (though understandably the censors were alarmed by the deposition scene and it does not

²⁹ J. H. Hexter, 'Property, monopoly and Shakespeare's *Richard II*' in P. Zagorin, ed., *Culture and Politics from Puritanism to the Enlightenment* (Berkeley, Calif., 1980).

³⁰ For the significance of this phrase, and of Richard's failure to rule according to the law, see Donna B. Hamilton, 'The state of law in *Richard II*', *SQ* 34 (1983), 5–17.

appear in the first printed editions).³¹ On this point the chroniclers disagreed. In Shakespeare the audience is prevented from finding an easy solution. But on balance the play inclines no more to Holinshed, who thought the people very ungrateful for rebelling against a king under whom they had prospered, than to Foxe, who concluded that it was because Richard had deserted true religion and turned to persecuting the Wycliffites (whose patron was John of Gaunt) that God turned against him.³²

This alternative tradition helps to explain how Essex's followers might have seen this 'old play' as worth restaging on the eve of their adventurist revolt. Having attended many performances, they were perhaps in a better position than we are to judge whether on balance it would encourage the popular audience to approve or disapprove of rebellion: though Shakespeare's company, when questioned by the Privy Council, were able to convince them that they had had no topical or seditious intent.

Essex wildly miscalculated the support for his 'last honour revolt'.³³ The city and commons' grievances over monopolies, taxes, and religion were not felt primarily against the crown: the old Queen remained more popular than her nobility and was still widely seen as guardian of the nation's independence. Moreover, Essex did not command either the wealth and military power or the degree of court influence which had enabled his stepfather Leicester to take, within limits, an independent line. Essex was personally popular as a military hero, but that was not enough to rally to him the money-men of the city whose support he expected. The anticipated 'historical bloc' of dissident aristocracy, discontented officers, disappointed office-seekers, city magnates, puritan preachers and their congregations fell ingloriously apart, and Essex and many of his followers went to execution.

For the time being, the Essex disaster brought history plays of the existing type to a halt. No English history at all could be published without special authority from the Privy Council; and the King's Men made prudent cuts in their *Henry IV, Part 2* before publication in 1600. Celebratory national history, as in *Henry V* (1599), gives place to a tragic sense of history in *Hamlet* (1601), *Sejanus*, or *King Lear*. Nevertheless Richard II (and Shakespeare's version of his story) continued important in later political discussion. The argument of some modern historians that the Civil War and the English

³¹ Cyndia Susan Clegg, "'By the choise and inuitation of al the realme": *Richard II* and Elizabethan press censorship', *SQ* 48 (1997), 432–48.

³² John Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (1583), p. 513.

³³ The phrase is from Mervyn James, *Society, Politics and Culture* (1986), chapter 9: 'At a crossroads of the political culture: the Essex Revolt, 1601'. For support of Essex by puritan preachers, see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), pp. 444–7.

Revolution were not the result of long-term ideological and political divisions seems less than convincing if one studies the drama in the 1590s, when the régime was still stable enough to allow a degree of frankness that later became impossible.

V

The death of Essex marked the end of an ideological epoch; and the tragic political implications of his fall resonate through much early-Jacobean drama, partly because the case was felt as much more than an individual one. The proud favourite and war leader, in conflict with an increasingly centralized absolutist state, and finally crushed as a traitor, was very much a figure for the times, and could suggest Raleigh as readily as his rival Essex. A deepening rift between the crown and sections of dissatisfied aristocrats and gentry, excluded from a central power increasingly controlled by a single faction (at this time Cecil's), opened terrifying prospects of instability, whichever side one inclined to. But for many people Essex was still unequivocally a Protestant hero and a protector of puritan clergy, 'framed' for his opposition to a Catholic-inspired succession.³⁴ His memory was appealed to in many writings over the next thirty years.

Thus Samuel Daniel (a protégé of Greville and Lady Pembroke) was summoned before the Privy Council in 1605 because his tragedy *Philotas* (1604), dealing with a general of Alexander the Great tortured and executed for treason, was held to refer too directly to the Essex affair (though the playwright denied writing it for that purpose). On the other side of the case, William Barlow's official funeral sermon for Essex, preached by Cecil's order at Paul's Cross to justify to the people the execution of their hero, drew an extended parallel between Essex and Coriolanus, a comparison which both Shakespeare and his audience would have known about. The most striking dramatic analogy is in Chapman's two-part play from modern French history about Charles Duke of Byron (executed in 1602), where analogies are specifically drawn between Byron and Essex by the doomed protagonist himself.³⁵ These plays too attracted censorship, and many passages appear to be missing from the published text.

The real-life Byron had been a friend of the Earl of Southampton and an associate of Essex, who like him fought in the French wars of religion on the side of Henri of Navarre, the Huguenot leader who became Henri IV.

³⁴ Compare Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel Hutchinson* (reprinted 1968), p. 61.

³⁵ *The Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron*, 4.1; 5.1.

Chapman shows Byron in peacetime growing personally arrogant and ambitious and hence easily manipulated by the King's enemies. While on an embassy to England he is warned by Queen Elizabeth of the dangers of subjects aspiring to compete with kings, but pays no heed and rushes headlong to his destruction. The protracted struggle between the cool, skilful monarch and his enraged and passionate aristocrat-general is rendered in powerful Marlovian verse. Although Henri IV (despite his politic conversion to Catholicism) was still regarded as a great hero and ally, both by Chapman's particular patron Prince Henry and by the English Protestant public, the regret and pain aroused on Byron's behalf create an intense effect of tragedy and waste. The Machiavellianism of the King's counsellors, and his inevitable use of informers and *agents-provocateurs*, attract a degree of sympathy to Byron even in his blindness and folly. The figure of the individual bastard-feudal war-lord frustrated by dependence on the new absolutist state – a Tamburlaine without the space to dominate the world – is applicable both to this play and to *Bussy D'Ambois*, and perhaps also to Alcibiades in *Timon* and to *Coriolanus*.

More generally, the characteristic images of Jacobean historical plays are no longer of brave Talbot or Henry V, battles and sieges (less suited anyway to staging after war with Spain had ended and in the indoor theatres), but rather the state, the machine, the 'set-up' caging in the heroes. Spies and informers, driven by poverty and lack of political preferment, serve in dissolute courts under rulers shown as corrupt or even mad, aided by unscrupulous churchmen. The Italian, French, Spanish, or Roman settings distance all this and make it acceptable for the censor.

Much of what is usually called Jacobean 'revenge tragedy' or 'tragedy of blood' can equally be seen as political drama. The opening of *The Duchess of Malfi*, for example, sets the horrors to come not in a universal darkness where *all* men are 'merely the stars' tennis balls' but in the specific conditions of a tyrannic Italian city-state: conditions deliberately contrasted by the virtuous Antonio, in the opening scene of the play, with the enlightened monarchy of France, where the king rules wisely in agreement with honest outspoken councillors:

In seeking to reduce both state and people
To a fixed order, their judicious king
Begins at home: quits first his royal palace
Of flattering sycophants, of dissolute
And infamous persons – which he sweetly terms
His master's masterpiece, the work of Heaven . . .
And what is't makes this blessed government
But a most provident council, who dare freely

Inform him the corruption of the times?
 Though some o' th' court hold it presumption
 To instruct princes what they ought to do,
 It is a noble duty to inform them
 What they ought to foresee. (1.1.5–10, 16–22)

The 'shadow or deep pit of darkness' where 'womanish and fearful mankind live' is thus not timeless but historical, man-made. To establish this seems the only reason for Webster's opening the play with such a speech. A similar point is made in *The White Devil*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and with especial force in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* (4.1).

Fears of unlimited power are often articulated in classical history plays, based mainly on Tacitus (which were not subject to the general ban imposed on writing English history after the Essex revolt). Since the earlier, heroic Rome of Plutarch's *Lives* had been a republic, tyrannous emperors could not claim a divine right to rule sanctioned by the Christian God, but only the right of conquest and power. Hence the indictment of arbitrary rule arose naturally from the historical narrative and became symbolic. Sejanus was indeed used as an example in later political discussion as often as Richard II – in a famous instance, by Sir John Eliot denouncing Buckingham in the Commons in 1627.

Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603) is the story of a power struggle in which the emperor Tiberius, apparently manipulated by his unscrupulous upstart favourite, secretly leads him on to his own destruction. It is Jonson's contribution to the new 'politique' view of history, which aims to help political understanding and teach statesmen by showing 'what men do, and not what they ought to do'.³⁶ The play is frightening because – unlike *Woodstock*, *Henry V*, or even *Richard II* – it offers no way a good man can act or survive in such a state. Good characters do exist in this Rome, but as passive onlookers, incapable of action, their highest virtue shown in stoical endurance of injustice (stoicism, as J. W. Lever has stressed, representing the moral value appropriate to a despotic reign of terror). The climax is a brilliant and wholly negative staging of the Senate in session, showing the assembled senators shifting along the benches to get close to Sejanus while he is still believed to be the favourite, then, as Tiberius' agent reads out the speech which dooms him, shifting hastily away. Jonson himself had no faith in parliaments as a check on tyranny and folly in rulers. A plea for the value of history – scientific, unflattering history as a guide to future times – is written into the action through the historian Cordus, who before his execution

³⁶ Bacon on Machiavelli in *De Augmentis*, chapter 2 (James Spedding *et al.*, eds., *Works* [London, 1857–74], v.17).

defends the right of the chronicler to show the Caesar-killers Brutus and Cassius as heroes. James, we recall, disliked the vogue for Tacitus as a historian, thinking he defended tyrannicide and was far too critical of rulers.³⁷

The really damaging analogy was more general, with a court where scheming flatterers could be promoted over better men who had proved themselves in the wars and service to the state. Significantly, the prosecution of Jonson was initiated by the clever and ambitious Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, out of favour under Elizabeth but becoming rich and powerful through the spoils of office under James. He disliked not only this play, but the whole movement towards spreading education and instruction of which such learned drama was a part: 'For my own part, I think that so many schools as there is, is a great decay unto learning, for the number of raw scholars makes such a division and is a cause to broach so many new opinions... when the scum are sent out of the university.'³⁸

One of the features of later drama increasingly directed towards a gentle audience is the disappearance of parody of serious matters by wise clowns or sceptical commoners. The common soldiers and rebels in Beaumont and Fletcher (*Philaster*, *Bonduca*) or Ford (*Perkin Warbeck*) are merely contemptible or ridiculous. In early-Jacobean times, however, political plays in the open-air theatres still make great use of intelligent plebeian characters, and the counterpointing of clown and king reaches a new sharpness in *King Lear* (1605), one of the latest plays Shakespeare wrote for the Globe as distinct from the Blackfriars. Whatever other topical allusions may be found in *Lear* (to the controversy over the union of the kingdoms of England and Scotland for instance), centrally the play deals with a decaying social order based on links of loyalty, fealty, and patriarchal kinship, breaking down in conflict between the arbitrary old King and the predatory royalty and ambitious upstarts who surround him – all at the expense of the helpless suffering poor, who are ever-present in the poetic imagery though not in the cast list.

Studies of the alternative texts³⁹ have confirmed that the play was indeed thought to be dangerously political. The obvious reading is also the most

³⁷ For the influence of Tacitus in the period, see J. H. M. Salmon, 'Seneca and Tacitus in Jacobean England' in Linda Levy Peck, ed., *The Mental World of the Jacobean Court* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 169–88, and David Womersley, 'Sir Henry Savile's translation of Tacitus and the political interpretation of Elizabethan texts', *RES* 42 (1991), 313–42. For his dramatic influence, see Alan T. Bradford, 'Stuart absolutism and the utility of Tacitus', *HLQ* 46 (1983), 127–51, and Martin Butler, 'The Roman Actor and the early Stuart classical play' in Howard, *Philip Massinger*.

³⁸ Forster, *Proceedings in Parliament*, 1610, 1.79, cited Linda L. Peck, *Northampton, Patronage and Policy at the Court of James I* (Boston, Mass., 1982).

³⁹ Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, eds., *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear* (Oxford, 1983). See esp. p. 103.

likely – that the flattering, cadging courtiers and upstarts were seen at the time as flattering, cadging courtiers and upstarts, like James's expensive and much-resented Scottish favourites (or, prophetically, like the Duke of Buckingham – the analogies are not personal but historical). The Fool's references to Lear's having given away his land and his independence with it, and to lords and ladies snatching at monopolies (1.4), ring of the Jacobean court and state – patent-holders, tax-farmers and all. And these are precisely the references which the new textual analysts most strongly believe were censored or self-censored in a second version of the play. More broadly, *King Lear* dramatizes for a mass Globe audience the contradiction between absolute arbitrary power and the 'foolish, fond old man, fourscore and upwards' who wields it. The common people, whose wisdom underlies the Fool's proverbial gibing wit, know that justice is a matter of rank and money, and Lear comes to echo this insight.

VI

Meanwhile a quite different kind of political drama – optimistic, confident, monarchist, and patriotic – was growing up in the popular theatres. Sometimes seen as orthodox and non-controversial, in fact these plays on Tudor history, sometimes called 'Elect Nation' plays, centred on one of the main political controversies of the age: was England to be Protestant or Catholic, how far was the Protestant Reformation to go, and what right if any did godly subjects have to resist an ungodly prince? Uncertainty about the succession had made all this a burning question in Elizabeth's last years, giving the impetus for a new line of militant Protestant history plays based largely on John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. Both *Sir John Oldcastle* (1600) and *Thomas, Lord Cromwell* (1600) were built round idealized heroes who stood out for religious reform in the name of conscience and were martyred for it.

The peaceful accession of the Protestant James I, rather than the Spanish Infanta, did not end the fear of growing Catholic influence. His arrival with an ostentatiously Catholic queen was soon followed by an unpopular peace treaty with Spain and the first suggestion of the detested Spanish marriage for the heir to the throne. The hopes of the godly were dashed and Protestant fears confirmed by James's refusal to grant any increased toleration of puritan ministers in the church (1604), and above all by Gunpowder Plot (1605).

This context gave a political edge to a drama directly based on Foxe's narrative, and embodying his vision of history as the working out of God's purpose for England, an 'elect' or chosen people in the cosmic struggle

against Antichrist, with the English monarchy as leader and future ruler over God's kingdom on earth. The reigns of Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth, tricky or impossible to dramatize while she lived, and with them the events of the English Reformation, now became available matter for the stage. And Elizabeth, in whose time Foxe's book had been placed by order in all churches, was here cast as the outstanding heroine of Protestantism – a role that in her lifetime she had not always been so willing to accept, useful though she found it on occasion. The plays emphasize not the complexities, moral dilemmas, and contradictions of political action, as the 1590s histories so often do, but rather a clash between good and evil, right and wrong. In this sense 'they may profitably be viewed as post-Reformation versions of the religious drama which the early Reformation had suppressed in England'.⁴⁰ Equally they can be seen in their context as political plays, where the black-and-white moral scheme helps to make the story exciting, as it does still in the popular genres of spy-thriller and science fiction. And nostalgic praise of Elizabeth becomes an implied critical comment on James's reign.

In drama like this political issues, as so often in the seventeenth century, take a religious form; or rather politics and religion are inseparable, as they were in life. For what is felt to be at stake, at the popular level, is the survival of England as an independent and prosperous nation, the freedom of individual conscience, and hostility to the Pope. (Religion in the sixteenth century, as Namier put it, is often another word for nationalism.)

Almost all the Foxeian plays were originally staged in the amphitheatre playhouses, and their appeal, in both politics and dramatic style, is clearly to the citizen audience. Several of the playwrights also devised pageants and Lord Mayor's shows for the city – Munday, Heywood, Dekker, Webster, later Middleton – and some city pageants are directly reproduced in the plays, several of which were repeatedly revived at the Red Bull and the Fortune and many times reprinted over the next thirty years.⁴¹ Their detailed application varied with the political situation. They helped to rouse enthusiasm for Prince Henry, widely looked to as a more warlike, militant Protestant figure than his father (the parallel with the young Edward VI stands out in Samuel Rowley's play on Henry VIII, *When You See Me You Know Me*); after his death, to celebrate the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to the Protestant Elector Palatine in 1613 (several were reprinted at that

⁴⁰ Judith Doolin Spikes, 'The Jacobean history play and the myth of the Elect Nation', *RenD* n.s. 8 (1977), 117–48.

⁴¹ Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, Part 1*, achieved nine quarto editions; Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* reached four.

time); and later, in the 1620s and 1630s, to reinforce feeling against a Spanish marriage and for recovery of the Palatinate. *The Duchess of Suffolk* (1624), directly taken by Thomas Drue from Foxe's account, and Middleton's *Game at Chess* and *Hengist, King of Kent* (1618–21?) make use of similar traditions.

The common people, rather than the gentry, are represented as the strongest sympathizers with Protestantism and its martyrs. In Heywood's *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody* (1604), Princess Elizabeth on her way from the Tower to house arrest at Hatfield is greeted by demonstrations of loyal townspeople and children offering bunches of flowers, and comments: 'The poor are loving, but the rich despise.' In the sequel (*If You Know Not Me, Part 2*, 1605), the growing political influence and confidence of the city magnates is imaged in the great merchant Gresham, builder of the Royal Exchange, and the rich plain-spoken haberdasher Hobson, founder of civic charities, who offer a more-than-princely contribution (idyllically free of interest) to the Queen for the defeat of the Armada.

A new heroic model emerges, not always a warrior (though the Protestant rebel Wyatt in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* [1604?] is deliberately paralleled with Essex) but a type of civic courage. Religion based on individual Bible reading and rational argument, rather than reverent submission, is imaged in figures like the Wycliffite Oldcastle in the play of that name, defending his right in the name of conscience to reject papal domination, though not to organize 'conventicles' or rebel against the king. Often these figures are women. Thus Queen Catherine Parr, a strong-minded Protestant, successfully upholds her loyalty against the bishops who accuse her of heresy and treason to the King, in the presence of the confused but still terrifying old Henry VIII. The Duchess of Suffolk is another powerful personality, going into exile rather than submit to the Catholic restoration, and shown defending her husband, sword in hand. Elizabeth herself, in *If You Know Not Me* and *The Whore of Babylon*, provides the supreme example.

The wicked bishops are shown not only as agents of Rome, but also as greedy schemers seeking their own wealth and power. Reformers like Oldcastle and the low-born Thomas Cromwell attack the church's right to abbey lands, proposing (not altogether historically) to use them for the poor rather than to maintain idle monks. Within the stylized providential framework the playwrights humanize their subjects, using clowns and comics for satirical parody and comment, and providing naturalistic colloquial scenes for citizens and working people, represented as the true religion's strongest supporters.

VII

In the last years of James's reign the theatres were openly involved in the intense political controversy over the Spanish marriage project. Whether England was to follow the King's policy and enter an alliance with Spain, cemented by a royal marriage between Prince Charles and the Infanta, was a momentous political and social decision as well as a religious one, as was indeed recognized at the time:

The Catholic issue may well be a red herring, for the political significance of the Spanish alliance is far more revealing [than the religious]. The House of Hapsburg represented social order and stability in a world threatened by Dutch and presbyterian republicanism. The 'instructions additional' given to Sir John Digby on his embassy to Spain in 1617 expressed the hope that an Anglo-Spanish alliance would halt 'a creeping disposition to make popular states and alliances to the disadvantage of the monarchy'.⁴²

After the long-expected war broke out in Europe, and the King's daughter Elizabeth and her husband, the refugee Queen and King of Bohemia, became the focus of the Protestant cause, demands for effective English intervention increased. The debates on the issue in Parliament were conducted, says Simon Adams,

between men who saw events as part of a pattern of Protestant apocalypticism and men who, fearing the revolutionary implications of such an ideology, sought a policy more conducive to the stability of the political and social status quo.⁴³

There were deep divisions about both policy and strategy, impossible to summarize here. But there seems no doubt about the keen interest of Londoners in the European events, or the general hostility at a popular level to the Spanish alliance.⁴⁴

At the outset of the Thirty Years' War, Fletcher and Massinger's *Sir John Van Olden Barnevelt* (1619), directly political and topical, dealt with the downfall and execution of the famous Dutch Arminian statesman, accused of conspiring with Spain against the Calvinist Stadholder Prince Maurice of Nassau, leader of the Netherlands revolt against Spanish rule (which was to

⁴² Simon Adams, 'Foreign policy and the Parliaments of 1621 and 1624' in Kevin Sharpe, ed., *Faction and Parliament* (Oxford, 1978), p. 140.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ For a brief account of the political and strategic issues involved, see Adams, 'Foreign policy'. The general context is set out in Hirst, *Authority and Conflict*, esp. pp. 126–59. See also Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, pp. 215–34, and S. R. Gardiner, *History of England 1603–1642* (London, 1883), IV.118–19.

break out into open war once more in 1621). The play was at first banned by the Bishop of London, but a little later the players 'found means to go through with it' (presumably with the help of influential patrons). Heavy censorial intervention in the surviving manuscript, which included rewriting the ending, confuses the final political effect of the play. It was evidently intended, however, to show the great advocate as ambitious and disloyal, rather than a victim of judicial murder like Raleigh, and would have appealed strongly to the intense interest of London audiences in the European conflict.

In the following years censorship clamped down, with a royal proclamation against public talk of affairs of state and especially the Spanish marriage. Preachers were forbidden to touch on it, and several who did were gaoled, as were MPs who insisted on their right to discuss the issue. Poets such as Drayton were silenced, and George Wither sent to prison for *Wither's Motto* in 1621.⁴⁵ However, the climate changed when in 1623 Buckingham and Prince Charles returned from their abortive romantic expedition to Spain without the Infanta. Bells and bonfires greeted their arrival in London, and Charles temporarily became more popular than he was ever to be again. As Prince and opportunist favourite placed themselves for a time at the head of a 'war party' to recover the Palatinate, the edge of the censorship was blunted by divisions between them and the King, and the way was cleared for renewed political drama hostile to the Spanish alliance, and favouring solidarity with the Protestant cause. Plays with this general message were put on in all types of theatre, appealing to a variety of political interests and anxieties in their different audiences. Thus Jonson (who had earlier been writing on King James's side of the case) produced *Neptune's Triumph for the Return of Albion*, a celebratory court masque in which Charles and Buckingham themselves intended to appear.⁴⁶ Massinger's *The Bondman*, performed first at Whitehall and then for the mainly élite audience at the Cockpit in 1623–4, embodied through classical history the desire of the puritan gentry for chivalrous leadership in war abroad and aristocratic order at home. *The Duchess of Suffolk*, played at the down-market Fortune after being heavily censored for 'dangerous matter', was a typical popular Foxeian play, adjusting history to parallel the sufferings of the dethroned Queen of Bohemia more closely with those of the royal Duchess exiled under Queen Mary. The most famous of all, Middleton's *A Game at Chess*, put on at the open-air Globe in August 1624, played for a record run of nine days to packed houses before it was suppressed by the King's order, and was 'frequented by all sorts of people

⁴⁵ For sermons and pamphlets against the marriage, see Jerzy Limon, *Dangerous Matter* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁴⁶ It was cancelled at the last minute, apparently because of objections by the Spanish ambassador.

old and young, rich and poor, masters and servants, papists and puritans, wise men, etc., churchmen and statesmen'.⁴⁷ There were probably more plays with a similar political slant, now lost and known only by their titles: *The Hungarian Lion*, *A Match and No Match*, *The Spanish Viceroy*, *The Spanish Contract*.

A Game at Chess was unique not only in its boldness, but because it appealed far beyond the 'political nation' (who themselves attended in the best seats) to an audience that straddled the social divide, the kind of appeal that noble patrons would in normal times have been most unwilling to make. Referred to in contemporary records as 'our famous play of Gondomar', its main attraction was the caricature of the widely hated Spanish ambassador as a smooth, witty dissembler, popularly believed to have the ageing King in his toils. It is closely based on the famous illegal but widely circulated pamphlets of the puritan divine Thomas Scot, particularly his *Vox Populi*, first published in 1620 at a time when Buckingham and Charles (as well as King James) were all for the Spanish match. This was truly a subversive source, for Scot was a radical in politics as well as religion, continuing as a political refugee in Holland to issue pamphlets full of polemical praise for Parliament as the greatest hindrance to Spanish plots, and the Dutch republicans as the model of democracy and prosperity.⁴⁸

In style the play is a mixture of forms, in part a chess-game allegory (where the sexual moves of the black pieces represent the Jesuits' attempt to entrap the individual white Protestant soul), in part direct impersonation of public 'pro-Spanish' personalities such as Gondomar, Bishop Antonio de Dominis, and Lord Treasurer Cranfield. King, Prince, and Duke are also staged, though more respectfully. The satire on the Fat Bishop (as distinct from fat cardinals) would normally have been banned entirely by the censor. The fact that the real De Dominis (incidentally a propagandist for royal absolutism) was only a Catholic turncoat *pretending* to be an Anglican bishop for his own profit, and had changed back before the date of the play, gave the opportunity for a kind of anticlerical clowning which had been impossible because of censorship since the 1580s.

In this bid to rouse and reinforce public opinion, doctrinal controversy (whether between Protestantism and Catholicism or between Calvinism and Arminianism) does not figure much. Catholicism is presented rather as a political and military threat to England, plotting to enlarge the 'universal monarchy' of Spain and the Pope. The Jesuit black pieces are its military and

⁴⁷ John Chamberlain to Sir Dudley Carleton, 12 August 1624. N. McLure, ed., *Chamberlain Letters* (Philadelphia, 1939), II, 578.

⁴⁸ Scot had escaped arrest only by fleeing to the Netherlands, where he was closely associated with the Queen of Bohemia's circle.

diplomatic spies, as are the Catholic laity under their control. The appeal is national as much as religious, recalling earlier plays about the Armada and Gunpowder Plot; and the Fat Bishop is mocked not for his beliefs but (as in Marprelate) for living luxuriously and immorally at the people's expense. Since the doctrine is held to be only a smoke-screen for greed and aggression anyway, it is secondary and at the popular level can be largely ignored. Archbishop Abbot, out of favour with James because of his pro-puritan and anti-Spanish stance, appears briefly as the good White Bishop, who (with only seven lines to speak) saves the White Queen from rape and prostitution by the Black House, and earns commendation from the White King whom he has undeceived – not a heroic role, but enough to distinguish between good Anglican bishops and tools of Rome.

A Game at Chess was indeed a challenging polemical play, despite suggestions by recent critics that it was merely part of Buckingham's and Charles's propaganda campaign, and that by the time it was staged the issues it dramatized were no longer controversial. The original scenario might well have seemed acceptable to Buckingham (if he ever saw it), since it somewhat ironically supported the romanticized account he gave to Parliament justifying his journey to Spain, which was widely and deliberately 'leaked'. But the play is much more than an attack on the marriage: it also involves Catholicism generally and its growing political influence at court (which was to increase further in Charles's reign).⁴⁹ Buckingham can scarcely have been its direct sponsor, if only because of his own and his family's connections; his wife was a crypto-Catholic, his mother a well-known recent convert, and his sister and Buckingham himself were on the edge of conversion in 1622 (much to the King's alarm) and persuaded against it with difficulty. Moreover, by the time the play was staged in August 1624, Buckingham already knew that the *French* Catholic marriage for Prince Charles, currently being negotiated in Paris, would entail concessions to the Catholic religion in England similar to those the Spaniards had demanded, and which James had promised Parliament he would never grant – though this fact was successfully concealed from Parliament until Charles was safely married to Henrietta Maria.⁵⁰

The great age of the drama was perhaps the worst in English history for impoverishment and suffering among the poor and dispossessed.⁵¹ Yet this can find relatively little direct expression in the political drama, though the

⁴⁹ See the detailed study by Caroline Hibbard, *Charles I and the Popish Plot* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983), *passim*.

⁵⁰ A potential 'leak' was forestalled by arresting the danger-man John Reynolds, puritan tutor to Buckingham's nephew, then in Paris, and keeping him in prison for two years on a minor censorship charge for writing *Vox Coeli*.

⁵¹ See Michael Hattaway's chapter, above, pp. 93–130.

pressure of discontent and the danger of disorder are never far away. Those plays that do show economic distress with some sympathy also voice the fear that any revolt will lead to anarchy and plunder.⁵² Given the censorship and the real fear of rioting by desperate people, it could hardly have been presented otherwise. The aspirations and mentalities of the radical and democratic 'second revolution' are articulated, if at all, in Utopian fables and wishful fantasies of a poor man's heaven, divine revenge on the rich, a world magically turned upside-down.⁵³

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6

BRIAN GIBBONS

Romance and the heroic play

THE terms 'romance' and the 'heroic play' are useful as broad categories applied to Elizabethan drama, but they cannot be clear cut or definitive; rather, we find a proliferation of hybrid kinds of play, with certain exceptionally impressive works imposing an influence on their successors. Elizabethan dramatists were very ready to innovate, to combine different literary traditions and dramatic kinds in risky ways; at the same time they had to be practical, writing for fairly small acting companies and particular playhouses and, above all, striving to please audiences whose approval was vital: Elizabethan theatre was a commercial venture.

The main features of the early Elizabethan romance, part folk-tale, part chivalric, are traceable right through the period, down to the later Jacobean masterpieces *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, both of which, indeed, deliberately recall the early kind. *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* is an early play and, though it is not often read, it is discussed here because it shows clearly many key features of Elizabethan romance. As for heroic drama, the impact of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* is so great that some attention to it is essential. Having looked at one romance and at one heroic play, this chapter goes on to explore the increasingly diverse kinds of play, and diverse forms of attention, devoted to the heroic life (whether martial, political, or amorous) and to romance (whether fantastic or historical, exotic or familiar, sublime or travesty). It is impossible to be properly systematic, since this would be to falsify the contexts in which these plays were devised and performed; and while there is a line of chronological sequence to be traced, it does not imply any quasi-Darwinian process of overall formal or stylistic evolution. The crudest and earliest kinds of romance and heroic play persist throughout this period, at certain amphitheatre playhouses, although it is a feature of other theatres that styles change rapidly in certain phases, for instance at about the time of *Tamburlaine*, then later at the time of *Hamlet*. This subject of 'romance and the heroic play' cannot be confined in a nutshell; but then tidiness is not one of the heroic virtues, whereas magnificence and extravagance certainly are.

I

Here is a stage direction from *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, a heroic romance of c. 1570:

Enter King Alexander the Great as valiantly set forth as may be, and as many Lords and Soldiers as can.

We are reminded of the daring of the Elizabethan dramatists in presenting the grandest imaginable heroes: Agamemnon, Orlando, Julius Caesar, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra, Robin Hood, Joan of Arc – the list is long. The ambition of the playwrights and the challenge of staging such material are evident. As the above-quoted stage direction shows, the players are required to make this Alexander's processional entry as impressive as the size of their company permits; traditions of pageantry and street processions being splendid at the time, one may suppose the audience was not disappointed. Still, it is hard for the modern reader to feel impressed when this Alexander speaks, for later Elizabethan drama's blank verse has made his style sound very clumsy and old-fashioned:

After many invincible victories and conquests great achieved,
I, Alexander, with sound of fame, in safety am arrived
Upon my borders long wished-for of Macedonia soil,
And all the world subject have through force of warlike toil . . .
In field who hath not felt my force where battering blows abound?
King or keysar, who hath not fixed his knees to me on ground?¹

This sounds like the tyrant in a mystery play or some warrior hero in a pageant or St George folk-play, where the two-dimensional figures stand for something essentially too remote and extraordinary to be conceived of in terms of mere human personality: the whole point is the superhuman scale, the remoteness in time and space, the essential strangeness. On the other hand this playwright generally reveals a quite literate understanding of the romance mode.

Although its clumsy dialogue is a barrier, in fact *Sir Clyomon* gives dramatic form to virtually all the key elements of romance and seriously attempts to create and manipulate audience response in the special terms associated with the genre, where intuition of some higher power shaping human lives is implied in complex plots, which the reader or spectator knows more fully than individual characters in the fiction do, but where surprises and

¹ *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, thought by Dyce to be by Peele, is now usually supposed to be anonymous. Quotations from Dyce's edition of *The Dramatic and Poetic Works of Greene and Peele* (1861), pp. 497–8.

revelations to the reader or spectator also occur, the more vivid for their shattering the illusion of superior knowledge. The rhythmic alternation between idyllic episodes of pleasure, of robust comedy, danger, physical and emotional deprivation, and ecstatic reunion means that romance narrative has as its primary function the sustaining and developing of an emotional trajectory: and the episodes are significant in this respect before any other.

In *Sir Clyomon* the dramatist aims at a full-blooded representation of the familiar material to please a paying audience, so he begins with a hero entering alone and clearing the air with a big speech developing an epic simile, in which he compares his state to that of a wandering voyager at last returning home from the sea:

So likewise I Clamydes, Prince of Suavia, noble soil,
 Bringing my bark to Denmark here, to bide the bitter broil
 And beating blows of billows high, while raging storms did last,
 My griefs were greater than might be, but, tempests overpast,
 Such gentle calms ensued have . . .
 So that I have through long travail at last possessed the place
 Whereas my bark in harbour safe doth pleasures great embrace.
 (p. 491)

The metaphors here are given no personal psychological resonance, though they have potential: when Clamydes says (completing the figure comparing his love suit to a tempestuous voyage) that his beloved lady Juliana 'Did me permit with full consent to land upon her shore' (p. 491), there is no personal shaping of the metaphor. Marlowe in *Dido* (1587? 1591?), by contrast, uses such images for their erotic and psychological implications:

DIDO
 Speaks not Aeneas like a conqueror?
 Oh blessed tempests that did drive him in!
 Oh happy sand that made him run aground! . . .
 Oh that I had a charm to keep the winds
 Within the closure of a golden ball;
 Or that the Terrene sea were in mine arms
 That he might suffer shipwrack on my breast,
 As oft as he attempts to hoist up sail!²

In early-Elizabethan popular dramatic romance, characters directly announce their identity to the audience; exits and entrances are undisguised acts of theatre, motives are openly asserted, expository speeches are delivered

² Christopher Marlowe, *The Tragedy of Dido Queen of Carthage*, ed. Roma Gill (Oxford, 1971), p. 38.

in a choric manner, the audience is frankly acknowledged. These surviving representational conventions of medieval drama are often consciously retained in romantic plays throughout the period, as if the dramatist felt their naive quality essential to the mode. This is something easily recognized in Shakespeare's most mature and original work in the mode, where he retains among other more subtle and profound styles the naively presentational, as in Charles the wrestler in *As You Like It*, Gower in *Pericles*, Cloten or Pisanio in *Cymbeline*, Camillo or Autolycus, for instance, in *The Winter's Tale*.

In *Sir Clyomon* Juliana abruptly presents Clamydes with a heroic task, to bring her from the Forest of Strange Marvels the head of a flying serpent that has an insatiable desire for women, but she seems very matter-of-fact about this, and Clamydes makes no comment. He simply departs, pausing only to get a knighthood from his royal father in Suavia. He resolves to

address myself, in hope of honour's crown,
Both tiger fell and monster fierce by dint for to drive down.
(p. 493)

Flying serpents, tigers, minotaurs, they will all serve equally well in a romance, the choice is arbitrary; but the structural code by contrast is very precise: the hero must be chivalrous and a virgin to overcome his exact opposite, a sexually depraved monster roaming in a wilderness.

The structural patterning is prominent in other areas, too: this mode is at once naive and elaborately artificial. For example, immediately juxtaposed to this scene presenting Clamydes, we have the first entrance of Clyomon, the other wandering knight. He enters alone, then calls back off stage to some 'fellow'. It turns out to be Subtle Shift the trickster-Vice who suddenly makes an entrance '*backwards, as though he had pulled his leg out of a mire, one boot off*'. The stage image offers a perfect parodic inversion of the lofty or bombastic heroic entrances we have just witnessed. Shift establishes an informal relationship with the audience, using humour, jokes, and asides to develop an ironic stance to his roles within the romance fiction. His place in the symmetrical pattern is equidistant to all the other characters, reflecting yet also questioning and subverting what they stand for: Shift as a shape-changer is at once part of the fiction and superior to it, like a mortal and yet not one (even at one point assuming an allegorical name). No mere wizard is a match for him. In him we recognize the seeds of familiar Shakespearean characters as diverse as Autolycus and Falstaff, the Fool in *Lear*, and Ariel in *The Tempest*.

In subsequent interwoven adventures, although the surface impression may be of naive shapelessness, there is in fact a consistent design arranging narrative motifs in parallel. There are two knightly combats fought on

stage: the first shows Clyomon killing the traitor king of Norway, the second shows villainous Sans Foy running away from Clamydes. These symmetrically related combats are balanced against two intervening occasions when Clyomon and Clamydes face one another but Alexander prevents them fighting. Such prominent symmetry is a permanent feature of romance drama.

A reader's impression of crowded, wide-ranging, and exotic action is not likely to correspond with an audience's experience of the play in performance. The knights' sea-journeys are referred to but not depicted on stage (at one point there is an off-stage noise of mariners and a single boatswain does appear on stage, but he is not even wet). There is a monster, but only its severed head is shown and a description of the battle with it has to suffice. There is a rustic and his dog (a traditional comic turn); he refers to neighbours, Madge, Joan, Hodge, Nicholl, Gillian, Jack, Jenkin, but we do not see any of them. Properties are simple and emblematic: knights have shields, one white, one golden; heroic persons bear swords, kings have royal maces, shepherds sheephooks, wizards wands. Clyomon acquires a monster's head, Shift a bag of gold. A god descends to a tomb-property. Different locations could have been marked by painted backcloths, the courts by a chair of state, the prison by a grille in wall or stage floor. In the writing we note equally simple demands for acting and interpretation. At the same time what is narrated but not shown has potential for a much more extravagant and spectacular kind of treatment: there are divine and infernal episodes, sea voyages to 'ferne strondes', and divers exotic foreign races. Clamydes speaks of the Hydra and the Minotaur, kills a monster, is enchanted, and meets one of the Nine Worthies.

What all this does show is the dramatist's awareness of the kind of theatrical experience heroic romance should offer: a narrative in which submerged patterns, cross-linked, are slowly made to emerge, and then with wonder welling up through the surface effect of surprise. It offers dramatic rather than simply literary prototypes of scene building and stagecraft for romance; and the all-important control and manipulation of audience response and involvement is attempted.

The final reconciliation in the play, between Clyomon and his long-lost beloved, is prepared for by taking the audience through a rapid sequence of surprises and contrasting emotions: mystery, farce, joyful revelation. A beautiful mysterious lady is brought to Clyomon, and bemuses him with a series of riddling questions; these allow the audience to guess at her identity moments before Clyomon at last realizes with astonished joy that she is indeed his beloved. The structure of this episode is a clear prototype for those richly emotional endings Shakespeare contrives in his romantic plays, most obviously perhaps *All's Well*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winter's Tale*, and

Cymbeline; what is achieved there, and only implied here, is a sense of personal reintegration, or spiritual union, which poetic and visual stage metaphors can suggest.

Such early plays as *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes* are clearly designed with certain practical constraints in mind (limited staging resources, a small company of actors): these are features of the professional stage at the time in London, where the Red Lion opened in 1567, Burbage's Theatre in 1576, and the Curtain in 1577. Most of the plays listed by Alfred Harbage in his *Annals of the English Drama* for the years 1570 to 1585 are lost, although heroic romances are listed regularly (there are twelve, plus a number of other 'romances' which may have been 'heroical'). A number of the titles suggest similarity to *Sir Clyomon: Herpetulus the Blue Knight* (1574), *The Irish Knight* (1577), *The Solitary Knight* (1577), *The Knight in the Burning Rock* (1579). Of the plays actually extant from the time, *Cambises* (1561), *Patient Grissel* (1559), *Horestes* (1567), *Common Conditions* (1576), we can note that they are different enough from one another to prevent firm classification. Reading *Sir Clyomon*, with no other English heroic romances of the time to compare it with, is therefore likely to remind us of non-dramatic romances translated from Spanish or French: indeed the play's source has been found in one of the six folio volumes, in French, of the romance *Perceforest* (1528). Sir Philip Sidney's mocking description of heroic romance plays confirms that *Sir Clyomon* typifies the early kind. Andrew Gurr argues that romantic narratives like *Sir Clyomon* were 'evidently the staple of the amphitheatre playhouses at first, and their popularity evoked enough protests from the more educated end of the audience range to give early notice of a social division in tastes. George Whetstone in 1578, and in the 1580s Stephen Gosson, Philip Sidney, and John Lyly all poured scorn on the medleys of romantic fantasy staged with cardboard monsters and knockabout clowns. The vigour of the protests might be taken as an acknowledgement of the popular hold such plays had, and also of the players' aim to attract a mass rather than a select audience.'³

At the same time, the great magnates Leicester and Sussex, who played a part in sponsoring the new playhouses, did so partly because it fitted in with their ambitious schemes for self-advancement: to be granted the honour of presenting plays at court was a conspicuous sign of power and influence. The chivalric romance play might support such a drive for court prestige in its highly stylized and idealized representation of the aristocratic life, while its endearing rustics and witty servants provided regional English local colour to set off the international culture, alliances, and fame of the hero. The

³ Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 116.

vagueness about time, place, and political issues might be very welcome, and tactful, at court; so too, perhaps, might be the fact that the noble characters tend to be little more than ciphers and likely to pass the censorious eye of the Master of the Revels, who selected plays for court performance, editing and amending them as he saw fit.

Elizabeth followed her predecessors Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary in imposing censorship on the drama. The Proclamation of May 1559 forbade performance of all plays without prior licence; magistrates were charged not to license plays 'wherein either matters of religion or of the governance of the estate of the commonweal shall be handled or treated', because these are only to be treated by 'men of authority, learning and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience, but of grave and discrete persons'.⁴ We may note of the romance and heroic play like *Sir Clyomon*, the earlier, naive kind, that conservatism is implicit in the dominance of conventional values through the agency of a token providence. The deliberately distanced presentation of the heroic reinforces not simply the prevailing English social system of ranks and estates but a whole official *Weltanschauung*. The polarization of high and low characters means that non-heroic characters express themselves with familiar directness and physical crudity. This also licenses the expression of rebellious attitudes, but in plays of this type this scarcely constitutes a threat to topple the state.

By contrast the non-dramatic heroic romances of Sidney and Spenser persistently explore the complexities, moral, political, and psychological, of the role of hero and the nature of courts and government, including treacherous servants and rebellious rustics – though always under the veil of pastoral convention. It is these two great non-dramatic writers who gave powerful precedent to later Elizabethan dramatists in the presentation of aristocratic life at court – seen with deep perception and a forthright, even bleak, recognition of the ways of power and the nature of princes. *The Faerie Queene* and *The Arcadia* furnish sources for various kinds of play: pastoral love-romance, grand tragedy, satire, tragicomedy: they also offer models for the structure of narrative, which dramatists took over for their own use.

The bizarrely contradictory potential of Elizabethan romance, for idealism and for mere ambitious self-assertion, is nowhere better illustrated than in the Earl of Leicester's extraordinarily lavish and spectacular display of entertainments for Queen Elizabeth at his castle of Kenilworth in 1575. Time, space, and money were virtually unlimited (a striking contrast to the staging of formal plays whether in public or at court), and the programme included

⁴ Cited by Wickham, *Early English Stages*, II.1.75.

simple traditional rustic events involving local people, as well as Arthurian and classical shows. The whole affair, however much credit it might throw on the earl, derived its essential energy from a sense of communal, local, and regional pride, from a spirited celebration of popular and learned modes of festivity in which extreme contrasts and diversity were accepted, indeed savoured, each having its own integrity. The earl's castle of Kenilworth and its surrounding park was the setting: at the Queen's arrival she was welcomed by the classical hero Hercules and ten sibyls; there were chivalric jousts later, and a great water pageant took as its theme chivalric romance, with floating islands for Merlin's prison and the Lady of the Lake, dolphins to carry Proteus and Tryton, and dragons with fireworks. Mingled with these Arthurian and classical shows were rustic events, such as a Brideale (a mock wedding of two ugly rustics), and a Hock Tuesday play performed out of doors by the citizen guildsmen of Coventry, representing the battle of the English and the Danes in 1042, and including foot and mounted soldiers, with words as well as drums and much physical action. It is characteristic of the occasion that the play was performed twice because the first time the Queen was distracted by dancing being performed in the room from which she was watching. Another entertainment, the courtly work of Gascoigne, was, it seems, not performed because the Queen's humour changed,⁵ though Gascoigne did succeed in another role, as a Green Man, clad in moss and ivy, appearing from a wood and addressing a eulogy to the Queen as she passed by. It is remarkable that although some events took place out of doors – even on a real lake – both theme and spectacle were emblematic. Rather than striving for illusionistic realism, the aim was to assimilate the actual castle and estate into pageantry, to give them fuller meaning. The Green Man's surprise appearance is an irruption of folk-tale supernaturalism into ordinary life which accords with episodes in popular romantic plays.

The lavishness as well as the variousness and extremely extended duration of the Kenilworth entertainments show how strong the ambition of the earl was to display his princely magnanimity and his regional authority as part of his courtship of the Queen. The court at its Christmas revels or at a great wedding would customarily mount entertainments along similar lines. In the Tudor court, compliment to the monarch would very often be combined with self-advertisement in masques and entertainments. When Montmorency came as suitor to Queen Elizabeth in 1582 entertainments included a tournament in which a castle on wheels (a wooden frame hung with

⁵ See Helen Cooper, 'Location and meaning in masque, morality, and royal entertainment' in Lindley, *The Court Masque*, pp. 135–48.

painted canvas) and manned by the four Foster Children of Desire (Sidney, Fulke Greville, Lord Windsor, and the Earl of Arundel) besieged the 'Castle or Fortress of Perfect Beauty', which was simply the Queen's gallery over the tiltyard, but graced by Elizabeth's presence in it. Similar entertainments would be staged by students of the Inns of Court, as we can see from the descriptions of the Gray's Inn Revels;⁶ but the range of events would be less wide, and less various.

Chivalric romance, which is so prominent an element in the Kenilworth entertainments, was widely circulated in various forms and was extremely popular among non-aristocratic classes. A Coventry citizen, Captain Cox, the chief actor in the Kenilworth Hock Tuesday play, had a collection of chivalric romances,⁷ and though his owning so many books might have been exceptional, it is clear that the spirit of the Coventry players accords with the similar type of entertainment offered on the professional stages in London in the 1570s and 1580s.

Popular romance in the early phase concerns heroes who are remote in every way; meanwhile court romance characteristically invites oblique application to real persons of the time while sustaining the fictional nature of the material. In the 1590s and later, forms of romance are evolved by the playwrights in which identifiable real persons of the past and of the present are represented, their stories given romantic form; there are ballad heroes who are adopted as subjects for drama, plays freely based on legendary or regional folk heroes, and major figures of recent British history endowed with heroic stature in chronicle histories, formed in romance terms, to assert a providential destiny guiding the nation. Such dramatic forms are hybrid, and include varying combinations of elements, as will be shown in the following sections of this chapter. It should be remembered nevertheless that, though some kinds of drama evolve formally and stylistically and intellectually, others do not. Heywood's mythological romances at the Red Bull show scarcely a trace of conceptual development from plays two generations

⁶ See D. S. Bland, ed., *Gesta Grayorum* (Liverpool, 1968). A brief selection is printed in G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare*, pp. 1838–9. For further discussion, see Martin Butler's chapter, above, pp. 156–8.

⁷ Cox, by trade a mason, owned copies of 'King Arthurz book, Huon of Burdeaus, The four sons of Aymon, Beuys of Hampton, The sqyre of lo degree, the knight of courtesy and the Lady Faguell, Frederik of Gene, Syr Eglamour, Sir Tryamour, Sir Lamwell, Syr Isenbras, Syr Gawyn, Clyuer of the Castl, Lucres and Eurialus, Virgils life, The castle of Ladiez, The wido Edyth, The King & the Tanner, Frier Rous, Howleglas, Gargantua, Robinhood, Adambel, Clim of the Clough & William of cloudesley . . .' and many more, listed by Robert Laneham in his letter describing the Kenilworth entertainments. A discussion of the books is given by F. J. Furnivall in his edition, *Robert Laneham's Letter . . . 1575* (1871, reprinted 1907), pp. xii–cxxxvii. Quotation above from pp. 29–30.

earlier. This lack of evolution in certain kinds is partly to be explained by the specialization in naive and spectacular sorts of play in certain amphitheatre playhouses, with their appeal to a less demanding audience; and the fact is that certain very popular plays were revived regularly. The Fortune and the Red Bull amphitheatre playhouses 'sustained the repertoire of the 1590s right through to the closure in 1642, with Marlowe at its core throughout'.⁸ The Chamberlain's (later the King's Men) at the Globe, and at their indoor house at the Blackfriars after 1609, attracted not only citizens and artisans but the upper ranks of the population, Inns of Court students, gentlemen, and nobility, and performed most of the important plays of the period. That new kinds of play, and rapid evolution in established kinds, are a feature of the King's Men's repertoire, must have some connection with the appetites and responsiveness of the audience they played to as well as the resourcefulness of the players.

Folk-tale and mythic elements have an imaginative power, when expressed in naive form, appealing to simple and sophisticated taste alike; it is this which explains the ambivalent style of *The Old Wife's Tale*,⁹ perhaps. Sections of the play present folk-tales, The Grateful Dead, The Three Heads of the Well, and motifs from others, Childe Roland, Red Ettin, Jack the Giantkiller; at the same time intervening episodes involving the on-stage audience of Madge the old wife, and the Pages, induce the audience to reflect self-consciously on the inset actions: thus both naive popular comedy and sophisticated critical comedy alternate, without either seeming to inhibit the other. That so completely naive a heroic romance as *Mucedorus* was revived in 1610 may be partly due to the fashion for medieval romance and chivalry led by the Jacobean court. Shakespeare's first response to plays of this kind had been mocking, in the pageant of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost* and the tragical mirth of 'Pyramus and Thisbe' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.¹⁰ *Mucedorus* features a prince disguised as a shepherd. He rescues a princess who enters and exits pursued by a bear. The prince gives chase and makes a heroic entrance with the severed head of the bear, much to the 'content' of the princess. The prince also outwits and brains the wild man Bremono, with his own club. The episode in *Cymbeline* in which the

⁸ Gurr, *Playgoing*, p. 151. For an excellent discussion of spectacular plays in the period see Marion Lomax, *Stage Images and Traditions, Shakespeare to Ford* (Cambridge, 1987), chapters 1, 2, and 4.

⁹ There are admirable editions of *The Old Wife's Tale* by Charles W. Whitworth Jr (The New Mermaids, 1984); Patricia Binnie (Revels Plays, 1980) and the fullest, by F. S. Hook (vol. III of the Yale Peele, 1970).

¹⁰ See Patricia Russell, 'Romantic narrative plays' in Brown and Harris, eds., *Elizabethan Theatre*.

would-be rapist Cloten is challenged and beheaded by a prince disguised seems to recall *Mucedorus*. In *The Winter's Tale* old Antigonus exits pursued by a bear so that the life of the infant princess Partita is saved. In both cases the mixture of elements, gravely serious but partly ludicrous, corresponds to the early-Elizabethan heroic romance of Shakespeare's youth, but here wonderfully transformed in a new kind of dramatic experience, which enriches it. Both the strength of the folk-tale tradition and its playfulness are captured, while at the same time the ironic and allusive qualities recalling court drama give recognition to political and cultural pressures of the early Jacobean period: both extremes of romance are accommodated, with a degree of real tension.

II

As the 1580s drew to a close several events, historical and theatrical, occurred of great significance for romance and the heroic play. In 1586 Sidney died of wounds at the battle of Zutphen. In the same year was performed *The Famous Victories of Henry V*. In 1587 appeared *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Tamburlaine*, and *Alphonsus, King of Aragon*; and the Rose theatre was built. In 1588 the Armada was defeated. Militarism became extremely popular, in the theatre and the nation. Between them Kyd and Marlowe expanded the possibilities of the unrhymed pentameter, blank verse, for dramatic speech, and the expressive possibilities of dramatic stagecraft in the Elizabethan theatre.

Marlowe's *Tamburlaine, Part 1* has a prologue which mocks 'the jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits', thereby insultingly lumping together formal drama's rhymed verse with the farcical song-and-dance acts, or 'jigs', performed as end-pieces by clowns such as Tarlton.¹¹ In place of such doggerel Marlowe presents stateliness and 'high astounding terms', a hero who scourges kingdoms. The romance elements in *Tamburlaine*, its vast territorial scope, its wandering hero, the great exploits in war and love, the generation of emotions of sublime awe, wonder, horror, its gratification of wish-fulfilling fantasy, its providential design (however qualified), are in tension with its chronicle-history basis. More important, perhaps, is the Bible,¹² as a source for the treatment of the central ideas and for the scale of the conception.

¹¹ See J. S. Cunningham's note on this line in his edition of *Tamburlaine* in the Revels Plays, 1981, p. 113. See in the same edition pp. 21–2 for an outline of the problem of whether comic passages were cut from the text before printing, and if so, who wrote them.

¹² See Weil, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 201 n.35.

And his eyes were as a flame of fire and on his head were many crowns: and he had a name written, that no man knew but himself.

And he was clothed with a garment dipped in blood, and his name is called, THE WORD OF GOD.

And the warriors which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed with fine linen white and pure.

And out of his mouth went out a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the heathen: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: for he it is that treadeth the wine press of the fierceness and wrath of the almighty God.

(Revelation 19. 12–15, Geneva version)

Eighteen years separate the last performance of the York mystery cycle of miracle plays and the first performance of *Tamburlaine*. Marlowe's is an extraordinary reorientation of the signs and conventions of religious drama and pageant, but it remains a drama presenting world history by means of episodic scenic narrative, and in fact *Tamburlaine* does have debts to those mid-century plays its Prologue mocks.¹³ What is new, and extremely important, in *Tamburlaine*, however, is the attention to political and strategic issues, and to the detailing of many real geographical locations and nations. This gives an air of authentic worldliness that counters the impression usual in allegorical drama or romance that ordinary time, place, and causality are suspended or reordered. This may partly be due to Marlowe's source, George Whetstone. It was he who presented *Tamburlaine*'s career plainly as that of a 'poor labourer, or in the best degree a mean soldier, descended from the Partians: notwithstanding the poverty of his parents: even from his infancy he had a reaching and an imaginative mind', and a 'ruling desire'.¹⁴ In taking this as his central concern Marlowe revolutionized thinking about the heroic. It is its sheer intelligence, its radical drive, which makes *Tamburlaine* so alarming, and meant that its early imitators fell so short when they recognized only its more superficial features.

Thomas Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy*, performed in the same year, presents a complex personal drama interwoven with political intrigue and focused on social issues, in recognizable contemporary terms – and for that very reason, perhaps, distanced by being set in Iberia. Full recognition is given to the force of human will in conflict with cultural sanctions and princely

¹³ Pickering's *Horestes*, 1567, offers the example of an episodic chronicle making the transition from allegorical morality; some allegorical characters are retained but they are now part of a sequential action. A more direct structural model for *Tamburlaine* is *Cambises* (1561), which presents a sequence of episodes of chronicle history but structured to illustrate the hero's progressively iniquitous career until its end in retribution.

¹⁴ Cited by Cunningham, *Tamburlaine*, p. ii, who makes the point that Whetstone ignores the ancestry of the historical Timur the Lame in the line of Tartar Khans.

power; but this intently human drama is introduced, surveyed, and set in perspective, by supernatural characters positioned above the stage, one the ghost of Andrea, the other Revenge. At the end we learn that the human characters descend from the stage to infernal regions. Whatever our sense of their human pain, there they will play an endless tragedy. Kyd exploits the traditional triple division of the medieval drama, the stage-heavens, the world-stage or main acting area, and under-stage hell.

Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* has no scenes utilizing stage-heavens or hell, there are no supernatural characters, nor are there presenters to guide the audience in interpreting the events or to provide moral guidance. The audience instead must draw its own conclusions from the speech and action and visual spectacle. The hero, moreover, is himself an active and self-conscious deviser of pageants illustrating his role, and Marlowe places great importance on Tamburlaine's will to create his own role. Thus where in earlier romance or heroic plays a character simply presents his fictional self to an audience, in *Tamburlaine* the audience is required to give critical attention to the art: it is a question of persuasiveness: in this play the analogy between theatrical and actual role-play is raised in the opening scenes, and its profound implications lead to the very centre of the dramatic conflict, on the one hand serving to display the operation of power in terms recalling Machiavelli, on the other hand showing how powerful imagination can wield the systems of rhetoric, the art of persuasion and expression, to dissolve limits hitherto supposed fixed. Tamburlaine is endowed with a great range of cultural reference. Western classical mythology is at his command, and is disconcertingly defamiliarized in the mouth of this 'Scythian shepherd', especially when the audience finds itself irresistibly drawn by his astonishing language and exciting presence:

Ye petty kings of Turkey, I am come
As Hector did into the Grecian camp
To overdare the pride of Graecia,
And set his warlike person to the view
Of fierce Achilles, rival of his fame –
I do you honour in the simile:

(*Part 2*, 3.5.64ff.)¹⁵

Tamburlaine's vast conquests would persuade the audience that there are other views of the world than that which the Christian West promotes. In place of absent divinities Tamburlaine presents himself as a scourge of God, and towards the end of *Part 2* an audience may be reminded of apocalyptic

¹⁵ Quotations from the Revels edition, 1981.

images from the Book of Revelation; at the same time Marlowe withholds the Scriptural corollary of wrath, the dispensation of subsequent grace, so that Tamburlaine cannot be accommodated to this scheme. Perhaps the idea is, precisely, too conventional, as Marlowe would have found it in Richard Knollys, who explained the victories of the Turks as 'the just and secret judgement of the Almighty'.¹⁶ Montaigne notes in his essay 'Of Prognostications' that in public disorders men stunned by their fate will throw themselves back, as on any superstition, on seeking in the heavens the ancient causes and threats of their misfortune.¹⁷ Marlowe's way of involving an audience in a process of critical thinking by frustrating stock responses can be illustrated in his shaping of the episodes in *Part 2* concerning the Christians under Sigismond. Having made a pact, sworn on oath, with the Turk Orcanes, Sigismond reluctantly gives way to his Christian comrades' argument that a treacherous attack on the Turk would be 'necessary policy'; in addition they argue that oaths sworn with unbelievers are not binding. But Sigismond is defeated and interprets his defeat as God's vengeance. The Turk, musing on his own survival, remarks 'Now Christ or Mahomet hath been my friend.' Was the outcome a sign of the Christian god's justice? His comrade Gazellus dryly answers

'Tis but the fortunes of the wars, my lord,
Whose power is often proved a miracle.

(*Part 2*, 2.4.31-2)

In the final act of *Part 2* Tamburlaine commits three deeds of great cruelty and impious pride: he razes Babylon, breaks his oath to the governor whom he shoots in cold blood, and burns copies of the Koran. Tamburlaine's fatal illness follows and may be seen as the climax of this sequence, as retribution. Yet, as David Bevington remarks,¹⁸ Marlowe insists on a medical explanation by the hero's doctor: Tamburlaine's long life, his exertions, his temperament, naturally lead to death:

I viewed your urine, and the hypostasis,
Thick and obscure, doth make your danger great;
Your veins are full of accidental heat
Whereby the moisture of your blood is dried:
Besides, my lord, this day is critical,
Dangerous to those whose crisis is as yours:

(*Part 2*, 5.3.82-5, 90-1)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 80. ¹⁷ Weil, *Christopher Marlowe*, p. 200, n.15.

¹⁸ Bevington, *From 'Mankind'*, p. 215. Bevington has a chart setting out the structure of the two parts, on pp. 204 and 207.

Yet if we will we may ascribe this sickness to yet another cause, Soria's curse (4.1.178). This is then a more complex pattern than the case of Sigismond, where the first explanation is the Christian one, with scepticism having the last word; yet still here in the final act the issue of retribution is left provocatively unresolved. Both episodes take up the theme of 'policy', of the art of gaining and maintaining secular power, an issue clearly voiced in the very first moments of the play and set in abrupt relation to the sheer will demonstrated by Tamburlaine.

The invocation of a specifically Machiavellian perspective so early in the play exposes the audience to issues of *ragion del stato*, rule as art, not inherited mystery: a thing separate from religion, morality, or national custom; instead secular, international, impersonal. Machiavelli, who had himself meditated on the career of Tamburlaine, concedes in *The Prince* that fortune is of great importance to princes; but he ascribes equal importance to the possession of free will, and notes that fortune favours impetuosity, especially in young men, who are more ardent and audacious. It is Tamburlaine's unhesitating certainty which marks his first appearance, discarding his shepherd's clothes and assuming armour before the eyes of the captured princess Zenocrate and his own men, with the loads of treasure serving as a portable display of triumph. Tamburlaine accepts the adulation of his men, who amplify his impressive show with epic similes:

As princely lions when they rouse themselves,
Stretching their paws and threatening herds of beasts,
So in his armour looketh Tamburlaine:
Methinks I see kings kneeling at his feet,
And he with frowning brows and fiery looks
Spurning their crowns from off their captive heads.

(Part 1, 1.2.527)

This is hyperbole, the figure appropriate for the extreme: later in the play this fantastic spectacle will become actual, as Tamburlaine strives to realize his wildest imagining; but when the audience does see it, then, the effect is less controlled. The expression of princely wrath on a princely scale has already been heard when Mycetes gloats with sick cruelty on the martial triumph he expects:

I may view these milk-white steeds of mine
All loaden with the heads of killed men,
And from their knees even to their hoofs below
Besmeared with blood, that makes a dainty show.

(Part 1, 1.1.77-80)

Ironically, the colour scheme so obscene and insanely visualized ('dainty') by this weakling will be set before the audience's eyes in Act 4, when a white-robed Tamburlaine uses a captured king, Bajazeth, as a footstool to his throne, from where he declares:

So shall our swords, our lances and our shot
 Fill all the air with fiery meteors;
 Then, when the sky shall wax as red as blood,
 It shall be said I made it red myself,
 To make me think of naught but blood and war.
(Part 1, 4.2. 5 1-5)

To turn the sky itself red to suit a mood (as the stage was hung with black when a tragedy was acted) becomes actual in Tamburlaine's mind even as his imagination creates the metaphor. Expanding from his poetic conceit – in which the flashing blades and glinting lances suggest lightning – the cannon shot become actual meteors, supernatural omens: these disorders become apocalyptic, seemingly instantaneously, 'then' – as in Revelation (6.12):

And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earth-quake; and the sun became as black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.

Tamburlaine's changes of costume and of his tents, all white, then red, then black, mark the sealing of the fate of Damascus. This is more than military pageantry, too. No doubt Marlowe had in mind the colour sequence white-red-black of the horsemen of the apocalypse in Revelation. The Elizabethan audience are confronted with the existential immediacy, before their eyes, of something only just tolerable when read from a book. It is a serious and deliberate, not a sensationalistic, dramatic decision, like that of Shakespeare in *Titus* when he brings on stage the ravished and mutilated, tongue-less daughter of the hero, exacting a response from her horrified brothers and father on stage. It requires the audience to measure the adequacy of words, but also confronts them with the spectacular potential of theatre, where those used to listening must also look. The story of Philomel, in Ovid, was familiar: translated to the stage, it is almost unbearable.

Tamburlaine is full of injunctions to look, to admire, or to be horrified by the expressions of the human face, the posture, costume, and gesture of its characters; Marlowe certainly seeks to exploit the differences between language and show, and he makes Tamburlaine's refusal or inability to distinguish between what can be imagined and what can be actualized a central issue in the play's exploration of the heroic. Tales about the hero, writes Eugene M. Waith, do not so much excuse his moral defects as point to a

special morality. 'What matters most is something difficult to define, which pushes the hero to the outermost reaches of the human and even beyond.' It is a greatness that has less to do with goodness than 'with the transforming energy of the divine spark'.¹⁹ Marlowe's Tamburlaine pursues a career of sustained expansion, enlarging our sense of what it means to be without limits; it is not only that he makes actual what he imagines, but that he dares to imagine on so grand a scale.

Marlowe multiplies associations, historical and mythological, in expanding the significance and scale of Tamburlaine. Timur the Lame was the last great nomad Mongol Khan.²⁰ His predecessor Chingis (Ghengis) Khan had used his swift and devastating cavalry to win an empire embracing China and nearly all of Asia. The Ottoman Turks themselves had been horsemen from the steppes before converting to Islam and mounting a holy war against Christendom. The actual military campaigns dramatized in *Tamburlaine* concern Timur the Lame's defeat of the two Muslim states which menaced Christian Byzantium. Though in the short term this brought relief to the Christians, in the long run it led to their defeat. Though sixteenth-century European knowledge of Asia was imperfect in substance and muddled in method, the colossal scale and importance of this subject was obvious. That Marlowe takes with utmost seriousness the secular significance of this background may be seen in his focus on the nature of imperialism, both as a cultural phenomenon and in its individual human embodiment in the hero. *Tamburlaine*, in short, is not a play concerned with the past; indeed its hero asserts that he will make all the maps of the world obsolete by discovering new regions, and his new map of the world will have his conquest Damascus at its meridian. In the historical Tamburlaine's lifetime America had yet to be discovered. Elizabethan spectators, understanding this, might well be prompted to compare the activities of European conquerors in their own time in that new fourth region.²¹ Nor were there lacking men prepared to believe the fantastic tales of riches and wonders profusely abundant in that region. Raleigh remembered his Mandeville (though not gullibly) when exploring Guiana.²² Tamburlaine is neither European nor Christian, but stands above

¹⁹ Eugene M. Waith, *The Herculean Hero* (London and New York, 1962), p. 16.

²⁰ This material derives from J. H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance* (London, 1963; new edn 1981), pp. 22-4.

²¹ A useful anthology is Louis B. Wright, *The Elizabethans' America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965). See also Richard Marienstras, *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World* (Cambridge, 1985), chapters 5, 6, and 7.

²² For Raleigh's reactions see Hakluyt, *Voyages*, in the Everyman edition (Dent, 1907), vii.328-9. Hunter's discussion of Mandeville's *Travels* in his *Dramatic Identities*, p. 7, implies that Raleigh was gullible, which is misleading. Raleigh cites Mandeville, but also seeks objective evidence to confirm his account of strange creatures in Guiana.

mere national significance: what is focused in him is a question as applicable to Asia as to the Mediterranean, located in the historical past but illustrative of the avant-garde thought of Machiavelli, immediately applicable, moreover, to dangerously near events in the Netherlands or Ireland as well as to Peru or the colony of Virginia. It is to be emphasized that only one of Marlowe's works is set in England, and that play of *Edward II* is memorable for the extreme wilfulness and idiosyncrasy of the King and for his suffering perhaps the most terrible of all deaths in Elizabethan drama. In other plays Marlowe focuses on the great issues of the European Renaissance: on the conflict of values in Aeneas just before he founds Rome (*Dido*); on the interplay of commercial, political, and cultural rivalries between Christian, Turk, and Jew (*The Jew of Malta*); on state politics and religious persecution in recent history (*The Massacre at Paris*); on the agonizing implications of Calvinism, and the terrors of spiritual struggle for the Christian (*Doctor Faustus*). After Marlowe and Kyd, Shakespeare and Chapman create heroic dimensions in drama for the treatment of political and religious crisis, but, as Peter Berek shows,²³ the challenge to orthodox social and moral thinking presented by *Tamburlaine* is not confronted in the heroic plays which followed, *Alphonsus King of Aragon*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, *Lochrine*, *Orlando Furioso*, *The Wars of Cyrus*, *The Wounds of Civil War*, *A Looking Glass for London and England*, or *Selimus*. Lodge's *Wounds of Civil War*, set in ancient Rome, offers stage spectacle reminiscent of *Tamburlaine* but neither of its heroes, Marius or Scilla, is driven by boundless ambition or imagination. By contrast, in Shakespeare's first Roman play, *Titus Andronicus*, the hero breaks all bounds as he becomes mad, and challenges the gods in wreaking his sublime and atrocious revenge.

III

Although in the wake of the Armada patriotic mass emotion was strong enough to prompt the appearance of many plays about war and English history, there were also plays devoted to local heroes celebrated in popular ballads or in such narratives as those of Thomas Deloney. It is important to grasp the significant social divisions in Elizabethan society, to which the plays frequently refer and in terms of which they are often to be understood. Harrison, in his *Description* of the nation published in Holinshed's *Chronicles* in 1577, defines the realm's four estates. The first estate included royalty, nobility, and gentlemen, all those entitled to a heraldic coat of arms. The second estate consisted of citizens, those 'free' (that is, members of a

²³ See Peter Berek, 'Tamburlaine's weak sons', *RenD* n.s. 13 (1982), 55–82.

guild who are employers not employees) within the cities. Yeomen were the country equivalent of citizens, free men born English, worth six pounds a year, and owning their own land. They were the third estate. The fourth and lowest estate comprised poor farmers, labourers, artisans, 'tinkers, shoemakers, carpenters, brickmakers, masons &c'. The rest, the unhoused, the unemployed, vagrants, beggars, and thieves, are given no estate at all by Harrison. Education and/or wealth might make the sons of the citizens or yeomen into gentlemen, and poverty might force them downwards in the social scale. There was an eightfold increase in vagrancy in London between 1560 and 1601.

In *George a Greene the Pinner of Wakefield* (1590) the yeoman hero's love defiantly sings a ballad commemorating his sturdiness and her contentment with a yeoman as a future mate:

I care not for earl, nor yet for knight,
Nor baron that is so bold:
For George a Greene, the merry Pinner,
He hath my heart in hold. (p. 256)

At the end of the play this positive view of the national hierarchy is reinforced when George refuses a knighthood: he expresses solidarity with authority:

Then let me live and die a yeoman still:
So was my father, so must be his son.
(p. 269)

A popular hero's fame also depends on his being of the people, as he shrewdly notes:

For 'tis more credit to men of base degree
To do great deeds, than men of dignity.
(p. 269)

George's achievement of folk-hero status is shown to irritate the greatest of all English folk-heroes, Robin Hood himself, who has a part in this play. On his first appearance he is being harassed by Maid Marian about his falling ratings:

whensoever I do walk abroad
I hear no songs but all of George a Greene
And this, my Robin, galls my very soul.
(p. 264)

What the play offers is a warm-hearted domestication of the mingled romance, using historical, legendary, and ballad material. It has an outer frame

consisting of the internal and external threats to the rule of King Edward of England. A group of discontented nobles led by Kendall start the play with martial display and speeches of heroic ambition. Kendall makes direct allusions to *Tamburlaine*:

Lest I like martial Tamburlaine lay waste
Their bordering countries, leaving none
Alive that contradicts my commission.

(p. 253)

The difference is that these are English rebels threatening English ‘country swains’ to support treason against an English king. These traitors collude with the King of Scotland, who is first seen menacing a fair young English mother who refuses his adulterous proposals even when he prepares to kill her plucky young son. The crude emotionalism the dramatist is aiming at involves confronting the purest innocence with the blackest villainy. That once achieved, actual death is avoided, for it will be necessary to gloss over the brutal and treacherous character of the King of Scots for the sake of the play’s overall tone. Furthermore, in a chronicle romance like this the writer needs the King of Scots later on where he can serve as the object of the English king’s magnanimous clemency, be firmly subordinated to England, and penalized:

Then let king James make good
Those towns which he hath burnt upon the borders;
Give a small pension to the fatherless,
Whose fathers he caused murdered in those wars.

(p. 269)

It is interesting indeed that the English king raises this question about the king’s responsibility for the victims of war, and it is characteristic that the issue is seriously explored in Shakespeare’s English history plays, and glossed over – except for its sentimental patriotic value – here.

This story of a double military threat to King Edward is no sooner introduced in stagecraft recalling *Tamburlaine* or *Henry VI* (c.1590) than it gives way to a quite different kind of drama, where the ballad hero speaks with the accent of Clyomon:

Why I am George a Greene,
True liegeman to my king,
Who scorns that men of such esteem as these
Should brook the braves of any traitorous squire.

(p. 254)

George makes one of Kendall's knights actually eat the seals on his commission. This broad comic mode is designed to prompt a crude response from the audience, playing on their normal feelings of discontent at the privileged and proud but channelling these feelings towards stereotypes as vague as any morality might offer: they can hiss a typical earl leading an insurrection, a typical invading Scots king, but this is old news when all dates are erased and nothing very specific is said. What is interesting is the fact that the focus is shifted to view state affairs from below. George is told that the earl has put his horses in the town's cornfields, so that we see how this feels to ordinary people. The messenger, moreover, tells the whole story in an absurd mode. First he appealed to the horses: 'One of them hearing me ask what he made there held up his head and neighed, and after his manner laughed'.

This satiric equation of horses with lords (which is still current in English images of their aristocracy) is quickly improved on when the nobles actually appear and he introduces them as 'three geldings'. This nonsensical mode is the trickster's or fool's weapon against authority. For a popular hero the corresponding mode is simple physical courage and a bit of native cunning. George strikes the traitor earl, but talks his way out of being beaten up; he goes on to entice the traitors to visit a local magician who can prophesy (this will be him in disguise). So develops a romance fantasy in which yeoman virtue and rural cunning overcome the perfidy of the great, a victory against huge odds achieved with much comedy and complete success.

The King of England decides to go to Wakefield in disguise and see George a Greene for himself. What is dramatized here is the negotiation of a cultural barrier between the common people and their ruler, but it goes further than that. As various strangers seek entrance to the town they are challenged and refused entry unless they fight a bout at longstaff. True to his trickster role, Jenkin jokes his way round this challenge. Robin Hood and his Merry Men are challenged by George, who fights bouts against Will and Much, beating both of them: an honourable way is thus clear to a truce with Robin, avoiding the awkwardness of a combat in which neither folk-hero could be imagined as loser. The king, disguised, is challenged and avoids combat. This failure to fight earns him George's contempt, but we may note that both king and clown evade the rules. Once he has seen George, the king reappears in royal guise, congratulating George as one chief to another; they reaffirm the treaty between monarch and people, an act which the play goes on to associate with the treaty between the states of England and Scotland. Beneath the crude populist manner the play expresses some important cultural values which align the people's hero with royal dynastic rule and the law; it draws parallels between folk tale and chivalric romance, according each rights and dignity.

In contrast Shakespeare's *Henry VI* presents two studies of a popular hero springing from obscurity to shake the state when the confusion of national crisis shows the weakness of dynastic rulers. *Part 1* of *Henry VI* centres upon the war between England and France. A simple pageant style is used to present Talbot, 'brave Talbot, the terror of the French' in Nashe's phrase,²⁴ an earl but loved by his loyal men. Joan of Arc, his opponent, is associated by many echoes with Tamburlaine, from her origins as a shepherd's daughter inspired by prophecies that she is to be 'the English scourge' to her victorious leadership and personal magnetism. She is a woman, but in armour (from the English patriot's viewpoint a terrible parody of Boadicea or Spenser's Britomart), she meets the Dauphin's challenge to personal combat and masters him. She is witty and ironic, and scorns aristocratic honours: when Talbot is dead and an English knight gives a roll-call of his titles (all thirteen of them) Joan replies in a true Tamburlaine style:

The Turk, that two and fifty kingdoms hath
Writes not so tedious a style as this.
Him that thou magnifi'st with all these titles
Stinking and fly-blown lies here at our feet.
(4.7.73-6)

Joan ascribes her power partly to destiny, partly to her virgin state. The French nobles treat this ironically, and there is Marlovian music and Marlovian irony in the Dauphin's praise of her victorious leadership of his armies:

A statelier pyramis to her I'll rear
Than Rhodope's of Memphis ever was.
(1.6.21-2)

Rhodope had been a courtesan, but these unconscious and conscious French allusions to Joan's sexuality remain unproved, while Joan's martial valour is unquestionable. She takes Rouen with witty tactics; the bluff Talbot, defeated, ascribes her success to witchcraft, thus exposing him (to the discomfort of patriotic English audiences) as mean-minded. Shakespeare provokes his audience in these ways to take an unfamiliarly French view of Joan, something reinforced by showing the close similarities between English and French court impotence and irresponsibility. But Shakespeare cannot, perhaps, go all the way and anticipate Shaw; the English patriotic fervour is gratified by two crude episodes²⁵ in which Joan is seen exactly as English propaganda presented her. This ending is abrupt and theatrically reactionary: her evil spirits '*walk and speak not*', '*They hang their heads*', '*They shake*

²⁴ *Pierce Peniless* 1592 (edn of 1966 at Edinburgh University Press, p. 87).

²⁵ 5.3.1-44; 5.4.1-92.

their heads', '*They depart*' (5.3.12–23). Joan has some characteristics of the clown, her sexual ambiguity gives her magic power, her will (until fortune deserts her) is boundless.

Talbot was a patriotic hero, which inhibited Shakespeare's treatment of him as a political figure; but in *Part 2* Shakespeare is free to explore a much more dangerously ambivalent folk hero, Jack Cade, a brutal man of the people, claiming to embody their desires, asserting their right to power. Though dispensing atrocity Cade does not act arbitrarily, he precisely inverts the civilized codes. The theories of Bakhtin about carnival serve to illuminate his nature and function.²⁶ Cade roots his leadership in a mock genealogy.²⁷ His comrades treat it ironically, not only as a parody of noble politics but in response to the whole spirit of inversion, mockery, and blasphemy customary at a feast of misrule. Their punning genealogy of Cade satisfies the criteria for a carnival king: a thief, the son of a bricklayer doing time in prison and of a midwife (proverbial for drunkenness) who gave birth to him under a hedge; his wife is a peddler's daughter. A criminal vagrant of this kind does not even belong to the fourth estate of Elizabeth's commonwealth; no wonder the citizens flee when he enters London at the head of his rabble. Cade twists official discourse to serve his lawless appetites, but he would claim that this is what authority uses its language for anyway. His comrades make reductive puns, saying Cade is only linked to the noble Mortimers in the sense that his father worked with bricks and mortar. Cade's argument against written law is insistently, reductively material:

Is not this a lamentable thing, that the skin of an innocent lamb should be made parchment? that parchment, being scribbled o'er, should undo a man?

Cade mocks the honourable art of war, too, acclaiming Dick the Butcher of Ashford for behaving in battle as if he were in his own slaughterhouse²⁸ and rewarding him with a limited trade monopoly, parodying state tradition. Cade commands his inauguration to be celebrated by causing 'the pissing conduit' to run with claret for a year. The London landmark yields an anatomical pun (coarsely anticipating the fable of the belly in *Coriolanus* [1608]). Anatomical too is Cade's command to burn all the records of the realm: 'my mouth shall be the Parliament of England'. This Rabelaisian assertion is edged by a comrade who fears Cade's gargantuan appetite: 'we are

²⁶ Bakhtin focuses on non-dramatic written narrative, in Rabelais, Dostoevsky, and others. The first of his studies to appear in English was *Rabelais and his World* (trans. Hélène Iswolsky [Bloomington, Ind., 1984]) in 1968. Bakhtin earned the disapproval of Stalinist authorities for his theories about the place of carnival and the comic as revolutionary expressions of the common people.

²⁷ 2 *Henry VI*, 4.2.31–71. ²⁸ 2 *Henry VI*, 4.3.1–8.

like to have biting statutes, unless his teeth be pulled out',²⁹ which illustrates the equivocal mode in which a carnival king is served. Cade's culminating pageant has a true spirit of Tamburlaine in it, too: severed heads of royal officials are stuck on poles and made to kiss; the now speechless voices of authority are mocked for their part in the defeat in France. Since Elizabethan traitors' heads were actually displayed on poles on London Bridge, Cade's pageant can be seen precisely to appropriate the official legal code in such a way as to make it seem itself atrocious; at the same time, Cade would claim that they usually stick the wrong heads on the bridge. This attempt to uproot the official discourse of law and hierarchy obeys some of the laws of proletarian revolution, but its barbarous excess conforms to the rites of festival rather than anything tolerably populist: it does resemble insane tyrannies of modern history.

IV

London doubled in population between 1580 and 1600 as its importance and wealth grew. The subject of the city of London became popular in the 1590s and 1600s in plays of many kinds.³⁰ Performed for audiences of Londoners, such plays naturally included allusions to local landmarks, streets and districts, and famous and legendary characters such as Dick Whittington. Local colour was interwoven with romance to produce encouraging images of the city as a benign paternal structure, its guilds preserving traditional values and guaranteeing patriotic sentiment in return for royal endorsement of its self-government. The city had its own kind of folk-hero, and playwrights invented freely to fill out the genealogy (much as heralds did for the citizens who bought coats of arms). Near the beginning of *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (1586), a play climaxing in the heroic national victory under the great hero, there is a scene in which representatives of the fourth estate, John Cobbler, Robin Pewterer, Lawrence Costermonger, assemble to keep the watch in Billingsgate ward, and gossip about the (as yet unreformed) future king Henry V. Cobbler says 'I dare not call him thief, but sure he is one of these taking fellows';³¹ the vintner's boy gives them some gossip from the Counter prison, where Prince Hal has been taken with his ruffian

²⁹ 2 *Henry VI*, 4.7.16–17.

³⁰ After Jonson's comedy *Every Man in his Humour*, 1598, ostensibly set in Italy but with vividly contemporary city life and dialogue, a stream of satiric comedies, mainly from the children's companies, rivalled the amphitheatres' output of plays featuring citizens. See the discussion in Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy* and Leggatt, *Citizen Comedy*.

³¹ Quotation from the edition in *Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas*, ed. J. Q. Adams (Boston, Mass., 1924), p. 669.

companions after a drunken brawl in the streets. The boy is concerned because his master's wine pots were smashed. This episode makes very clear social distinctions and a strong emphasis on property – indeed it is in just these terms that the depth of the Prince's outrageous conduct is to be judged. In later plays these matters of fact in the daily lives of real Londoners are interwoven with romance and heroic elements to create a distinct kind of late-Elizabethan popular hero, the citizen and the apprentice. At its most vivid in Dekker's play *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), the celebration of the city as a land of romance and the citizen as a hero is seen more clearly by contrast with a heroic romance performed at a rival playhouse, Shakespeare's *Henry V* (1599).

The audience is persuaded to respond to intense emotions of awe, exultation, and wonder at the climactic victory of the hero-king, though the persistence of his low companions might be felt to imply that in the long run chivalric attitudes and heroic life are impossible.³² The sublime, aesthetically speaking, needs protection from other modes, especially satire and farce, which are the stock-in-trade of popular comedy. *Henry V* is too intelligent a play, too dialectical in style as well as politics, simply to endorse sublime heroism, and its hero ascribes his victory to God. *The Shoemaker's Holiday* is also partly concerned with war in France, and a victorious English king appears in the concluding scenes, but this play is set entirely in London, focusing on the secular and civic institutional sphere of the city. Yet the hero, Simon Eyre the citizen, guildsman, and employer of shoemakers, does achieve a kind of heroic destiny, rising to be Lord Mayor and Sheriff, to build a market hall and establish a leather market there, which he duly opens with a Shrove Tuesday feast for the apprentices. The king himself attends, conferring market privileges on the building, which he names Leadenhall.

Eyre is Lord of the Feast at the conclusion, yet throughout he behaves as a kind of image of bounty, dispensing good cheer, energy, and a continual stream of catch-phrases that exalt both himself and the community to the status of popular legend. This glorification of citizen life is simple but vivid, as when Eyre enters wearing a new gold chain about his neck, to address his wife:

See here, my Madgy, a chain, a gold chain for Simon Eyre! I shall make thee a lady. Here's a French hood for thee. On with it, on with it. Dress thy brows with this flap of a shoulder of mutton, to make thee look lovely. Where be my fine men? Roger, I'll make over my shop and tools to thee. Firk, thou shalt be the foreman. Hans, thou shalt have an hundred for twenty. Be as mad knaves

³² For an intelligent discussion of the ambiguities of interpretation possible in *Henry V*, see Ralph Berry, *Changing Styles in Shakespeare* (London, 1981).

as your master Sim Eyre hath been, and you shall live to be sheriffs of London.
How dost thou like me, Margery? Prince am I none, yet am I princely born!

(10.149–58)³³

Such sheer energy and conviction in the theatre masters an audience's emotions. The painful, potentially bitter, realistic story of Ralph, impressed for the French war at the beginning, to return destitute and crippled towards the end, is given a romantic colour. He is rescued by an army of shoemakers, '*all with cudgels, or such weapons*', who drive off the bluecoat servants of his upper-class rival. This is also an instance of the dramatist's substitution of civilian uniforms and urban set-piece displays for the war spectacle of *Henry V*; the city has its own heraldic costumes and banners, rivalling chivalric pageantry. Yet the social issue of the returned soldiers bereft of livelihood is dissolved in the play's mass emotion of community dressed in festival guise.

In Beaumont's comedy *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1608) a citizen grocer in the audience interrupts the Prologue to object to the proposed play, titled 'The London Merchant', when he suspects it to be satiric. Instead he demands a play about a grocer doing 'admirable things'; his wife suggests 'let him kill a lion with a pestle', possibly directly alluding to *The Four Prentices of London* (1594),³⁴ in any case a satire of typical romance motifs (such as we see in the tragical mirth of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'). Once thrust into the play, Beaumont's Rafe the grocer's apprentice sounds very like one of the Four Prentices of London: they dutifully serve their masters, mercer, goldsmith, haberdasher, and grocer, but no sooner do they hear a drum and a proclamation calling volunteers to the holy wars in Jerusalem, than they are off. *The Four Prentices of London* begins in what could be the London of the audience in 1594, but recedes at once into the vague past of romance, where a limited and predictable series of adventures involving trials of physical strength, skill in fighting, loyalty, and sexual honour are played out with increasingly exotic foreigners, from the Spanish and French in Boulogne to Italian banditti and ultimately to the Turks. There is nostalgia from Eustace:

Oh that I had with me
As many good lads, honest prentices,
From Eastcheap, Canwick Street and London-Stone,
To end this battle³⁵

³³ Quotations from the Revels Plays edition by R. L. Smallwood and S. Wells (1979), which has some useful material in the introduction on the play's sources and its relation to other plays featuring shoemakers.

³⁴ This is discussed by Michael Hattaway in his edition of the play for the New Mermaid Series (2002), p. 12.

³⁵ Quotation from the edition titled *Dodsley's Old Plays*, with additional notes and corrections by Reed, Gilchrist, and the editor (1825), v1.427.

and Charles exclaims 'O, for some Cheapside boys for Charles to lead!' These are sentiments which echo on in Kipling and in the literature of the British Empire. They may be naive and familiar, but they express a strong ideology for all that: his back to the wall, and far from home, the British soldier responds first to an ideal which is rather local than patriotic in the full sense: his mates, his regiment, his family at home, these are the kinship bonds that hold in the field, and persist after demobilization. Nor have Charles and Eustace been wasting their time among the savages; they have done their best to reform them according to English custom:

Taught them manners and civility;
All rape and murder we repay with death;
(p. 428)

A motif straight from naive folk romance, such as *Mucedorus* (?1590), recurs in a later episode when a wild man of the woods, bearing a pole-axe in each hand, appears to drive off the Turks; it is characteristic of the one-dimensional mode of the play that this should turn out to be only Guy in disguise. The Turks are modelled on Marlovian examples, but the values of the play are propagandist in their glamorization of the English. The wish-fulfilling fantasy is not made stronger by some cheap sentiment when the arms of city livery companies are placed in the Temple in Jerusalem.

V

Plays like *The Four Prentices of London* domesticate the romance hero, making him reflect the loyalties and values of a citizen audience of a specific kind; the burlesque of such plays offered by *Eastward Ho!* is designed to appeal to a different group, an audience with different interests as well as taste for more complex and ironic observation of the times. Ben Jonson, in his great comedy *Bartholomew Fair*, set in Smithfield on a particular day in August 1614, presents a puppet-master through whom are caricatured the hack dramatists of the period. He defends his commercialism and crude workmanship, his little imagination, by claiming that audiences will respond only to the simplest stuff and that it is no good giving them classical masterpieces: Musaeus and even Marlowe are 'too learned and poetical' for them, so Hero and Leander must be reduced in every sense, Leander becoming a dyer's son about Puddle Wharf and Hero a wench from Bankside, the god of love a drawer in a tavern.³⁶ This attack on hack dramatists is not at any rate fair to Heywood, who at the Red Bull presented spectacularly wild extravaganzas

³⁶ Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, 5.3.

dramatizing classical mythology which, for all their crude construction, do genuinely express something of the strangeness and grandeur of those heroic fables. In scorning romance in dramatic form Jonson was consistent to his principles, that only classically decorous conformity to the unities was approvable: romance thus 'made nature afraid'.³⁷ Perversely, Jonson used strict comic form and observed the unities to reveal the fantastic and the monstrous right under the citizens' noses in London's Blackfriars and Smithfield, for *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* (ironically enough) have, both of them, more concern with the strange and the marvellous, with human aspiration and the reckless endeavour it inspires, than many ostensibly romantic plays, such as *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, which is based on adventures of sons of Sir Robert Sherley (died 1612), but never rises above the prosaic, despite the potential of the material.

Jonson's attack upon the travesty of heroic values by hack writers, too, is an attempt to insist on the importance of preserving understanding of the real thing: he feared for the trivialization of the whole heroic mode. It is therefore disappointing that he was unable to recognize that in *Pericles* it is precisely through the revival of old-fashioned, naive Tudor convention of heroical romance that the audience is conditioned to experience a journey which is not simply an external adventure but a drama of the spirit, where stage events are metaphors for inner exploration as well as narrating a geographical journey.

The essence of romance is an encounter with events so strange that the hero is challenged to the limits, yielding an experience so radical that it produces a transformation. Although erotic love is an important element in heroic romance, and the chivalric ideal personifies virtue as woman, the central concern of heroic romance goes beyond: even when a woman is the hero, as in *Comus* (the work of Milton which exalts the court masque form by infusing it with folklore and miracle and expanding its scale to epic), even in *Comus* it is the energy of heroic aspiration, the transcendence of limits, which is the centre. Beaumont and Fletcher followed Shakespearian tragedy, especially *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, but turned the action decisively inwards; further, they decisively narrowed the drama to sensationalistic confrontations of chivalric and courtly values; heroic romance serves as occasion for effects of horror and astonishment too often contrived by meretricious turns of plot; formulae of situation and attitude are evolved for courtly and would-be courtly taste. *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, in which

³⁷ In the Induction to *Bartholomew Fair* the author is asserted to be 'loath to make Nature afraid in his plays, like those that beget Tales, Tempests and such-like drolleries'. Elsewhere, in 'An Ode, to Himself' Jonson refers, in stanza 3, to *Pericles* as a 'mouldy tale'. These views are not given prominence in his commendatory poem 'To the Memory of my beloved, the Author, Mr William Shakespeare, and what he hath left us'.

Fletcher collaborated with Shakespeare, displays the older Tudor idea of heroical romance, but is curiously lacking in vital energy, as if too careful a reconstruction.

To compare *The Two Noble Kinsmen* with Heywood's *Ages* plays, or *Mucedorus* with *Cymbeline*,³⁸ or either of them with the later *Comus* (1634) is to recognize the kaleidoscopic variousness of this tradition. As in a kaleidoscope, each viewer is free to enjoy many patterns; and in romances, as in kaleidoscopes, random and arbitrary elements contribute much to the pleasure of the beholder – as critics need to remember.

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³⁸ For further discussion of the use, in *Cymbeline*, of earlier dramatic traditions see Lomax, *Stage Images*, chapter 5. For an account of *Cymbeline* as a play concerned with old and new dramatic styles as part of its treatment of the cultural history of Britain, see Brian Gibbons, 'Fabled *Cymbeline*', *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (Cambridge, 1993).

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7

LEE BLISS

Pastiche, burlesque, tragicomedy

THE roots of Jacobean drama lie in a late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century rebellion against the inherited literary forms and assumptions of high-Elizabethan culture. Wittily erotic epyllia claimed a place beside idealizing sonnet sequences and epic; satires that adapted Juvenal and Persius to attack contemporary vices provided one answer to the fabulous world of romance adventure. The vogue for Ovidian epyllia faded, while an official ban in 1599 ended the printed career of formal verse satire, but the restless, critical spirit such innovations embodied was an aspect of, and response to, the changing times, not limited to a particular genre or literary fad. In the theatre, pastiche and burlesque mockingly dissected earlier plays, styles, even whole genres, while, in the hands of the most inventive dramatists, coercing something fresh out of the fragments of a ridiculed past. More comprehensive revision of traditional genres produced new variants of comedy and tragedy and legitimated new kinds of subject matter. Partly out of such skirmishes with their predecessors, these dramatists created tragicomedy, a hybrid form that straightforwardly challenged the whole idea of a hierarchical separation of genres.

The initiators of the fashion for erotic epyllia were dramatists – Thomas Lodge, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare; some later contributors, like John Marston and Francis Beaumont, became dramatists. The late 1590s verse satire was more wholly a product of this younger generation, and the provenance of its authors and readers predicts the close interrelation between playwrights and one segment of their public at the beginning of the next century. The verse experiments addressed a classically educated, literarily sophisticated audience; their most enthusiastic readers were university-trained young men, often gentlemen by birth, who came down from Oxford and Cambridge to pursue legal studies at the Inns of Court, or at least to enter one of the Inns as a base from which to enjoy worldly London, dabble in literature, or seek preferment at court.

Inns of Court men both produced and consumed the latest in literary fashion: poems for private circulation in manuscript, printed collections of epigrams and satires that mixed classical and topical allusion, satiric 'characters' of social types that often veiled personal attacks on contemporaries, and plays. Dramatic interest extended beyond the Inns' own efforts: from the young John Donne of Lincoln's Inn, in the 1590s 'a great visitor of ladies, a great frequenter of plays,' to Edward Heath of the Inner Temple, who in the late 1620s attended forty-nine plays, theatregoing was a favoured pastime.¹ Closer involvement came with the reopening of London's two private theatres, closed during the 1590s: the Children of Paul's started playing again in 1599; the Children of the Revels, at Blackfriars, in 1600.

The private theatres were not the sole source of theatrical change, but for the short period in which they flourished they attracted some of the most innovative playwrights and proved powerfully influential, both in their own offerings and in the challenge they posed for the established, adult companies.² The satirist John Marston (Middle Temple) began writing for the revived children's troupes immediately; other members, like Edward Sharpham, wrote a few plays for them. Francis Beaumont (Inner Temple) started writing plays for Paul's, then Blackfriars; John Fletcher, not a templar but son of a bishop of London, began with the children's companies. Older poet-playwrights like George Chapman and Ben Jonson, who had initiated the fashion in 'humours' comedy with the adults, soon allied themselves with the more socially prestigious private theatres as, briefly, did Samuel Daniel, John Webster, and Thomas Dekker, and with the overlapping theatrical and poetic circles that linked the private theatres with the Inns of Court and its avant-garde intellectual life.

Economic pressures favoured the young dramatists' rebellious predilections. The reopened private theatres needed to establish an identity, a commercially attractive difference beyond the novelty of child actors. They needed new repertories since, as Marston joked in *Jack Drum's Entertainment*, plays left from the first Paul's company, like John Lyly's court comedies, seemed by 1600 'musty fopperies of antiquity'. Thus, despite the fact that numerous authors – Jonson, Dekker, Webster – wrote for both stages, and that private-theatre playwrights – Beaumont, Fletcher, Middleton – moved

¹ For the Inns' own dramatic tradition, see Finkelpearl, *John Marston*, pp. 23–31. On Donne, see Sir Richard Baker, *A Chronicle of the Kings of England* (London, 1653), p. 617; Heath's self-tally is cited in Prest, *The Inns of Court*, p. 155.

² R. A. Foakes, 'Tragedy at the children's theatres after 1600' in David Galloway, ed., *Elizabethan Theatre II* (Toronto, 1970), p. 39. On both private and public theatres and their audiences, see Gurr, *Playgoing*.

easily into later careers with the adults, the initial emphasis was on difference. Through the so-called War of the Theatres, the *Ho*-play rivalry between Paul's and Blackfriars, and some daring political tragedies, the private theatres rapidly established a distinctive reputation. In trouble with the authorities in virtually every year of their existence, the private theatres were exciting. And to the promise of up-to-date social or political satire, they added the allure of dramatic novelty.

An exhilarating combination of iconoclasm, eclecticism and originality marks these early years, and nowhere is this mixture more apparent than in the plays with which John Marston helped inaugurate the second Paul's, probably in the winter of 1599/1600, first with the bizarre romantic comedy *Antonio and Mellida* and then with its tragic companion play, *Antonio's Revenge*. Clearly fascinated with his new medium, Marston reveals an acute awareness of its traditions, classical as well as Elizabethan, and, equally important, its fresh potential. He mocks theatrical stereotypes and audience expectations, forcing characters, scenes, and speeches from different kinds of plays into unsettling conjunctions; he also uses the elements of the traditions he has fractured to fashion something new. The Antonio plays are paradoxically blatantly derivative and yet wholly unlike their models or competitors.

From the beginning, Marston focuses on playmaking and the creation of dramatic illusion as one of his subjects. The Prologue to *Antonio and Mellida* with ostentatious modesty presents the play as the product of 'slight idleness', and the tongue-in-cheek dedication of the printed text to 'Nobody' crystallizes this attitude and offers an aptly paradoxical apology for having affected '(a little too much) to be seriously fantastical'. Marston's method is a difficult one to bring off, a juggling act requiring a sophisticated audience very like himself. Even before the promised drama begins, Marston prepares us for a witty farrago of theatrically familiar bits and pieces from revenge melodrama, satire, and romantic comedy. The conventional dramatic induction, an apparently spontaneous pre-play discussion among the actors, becomes the means to ensure our complicity. The potential liability of boys in adult roles is turned into an asset, made part of a self-conscious dramaturgy that offers us the pleasure of recognizing and sharing the theatrical jokes and allusions.³

The boy players enter, parts in hand, worried about their adequacy to the dramatist's assignment, and we are introduced to the type characters and

³ For a fuller account of the play's use of child actors to enhance its parody of theatrical convention, see R. A. Foakes, 'John Marston's fantastical plays', *PQ* 41 (1962), and, in the present volume, pp. 55-7.

rhetoric the play will both parody and adapt. The tyrant conqueror – in Tamburlaine's vein – is immediately recognizable to players and audience alike. If the answer to the question 'Whom do you personate?' is 'Piero, Duke of Venice', the automatic observation follows: 'O, ho; then thus frame your exterior shape / To haughty form of elate majesty / As if you held the palsy-shaking head / Of reeling chance under your fortune's belt' (7–10). Confidence is bred of familiarity, but also contempt, for 'Such rank custom is grown popular' (15).

Marston has great fun mocking what had become rhetorical and situational clichés, but in what follows he does more than stitch together a simple dramatic pastiche. Verbal parody extends the play's pervasive attention to speech: language becomes an index of moral attitudes, yet is itself scrutinized as an instrument for expressing and controlling human experience. Marston marks off his fools and fops by their misuse of language, but we also hear the accents of Senecan stoicism and, in Antonio, both Petrarchan idealism and suicidal despair. A wide range of dissonant linguistic registers (including a twenty-line duet in Italian) draws our attention to dramatic style and the way it shapes both our understanding of character and our expectations for action. The Babel of languages and the abruptness with which characters like Antonio shift between different, though equally stylized, responses reflect the characters' helplessness in the face of events over which they seem to have no control. They are puppets of the available roles, in speech and action, and those roles prove inadequate; the play is rescued for comedy by Marston's imposition of another dramatic convention, the tyrant Piero's sudden moral conversion. The characters remain distanced from us – sharply etched, two-dimensional dramatic types that also represent social, philosophical, and moral categories. They are doubly estranged by a dramatic technique that continually punctures the illusion to remind us of our complicity in the process of playmaking.

With *Antonio's Revenge*, Part 2 of *Antonio and Mellida*, Marston creates a generic diptych. Part 1's happy ending is reversed; its earnestly moral protagonists are now forced to seek justice within a surrealistically corrupt political world.⁴ Many of Part 1's characters remain, but the satirized frivolity of Piero's court shades into lethal farce when Balurdo's inanity coexists with Strotzo's and Piero's gloating villainy. Although the self-conscious induction is not repeated, dramatic technique also links these plays, and sharp contrasts within as well as between scenes again complement discontinuous characterization. If *Antonio and Mellida* played fast and loose with dramatic

⁴ On the relationship between the two parts, see G. K. Hunter's introduction to *Antonio's Revenge* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1965), pp. ix–xii, xix–xx.

coherence, as well as theatrical illusion and convention, however, *Antonio's Revenge* yokes its borrowings to a shapelier purpose. *Part 1* had no dramatic precedent for its kind of comedy; *Part 2* takes clearer generic aim: *Antonio's Revenge* reconstructs a whole popular native form, revenge tragedy.⁵

Characteristically, Marston's approach is academic, eclectic, and theatrically sensational; rather than naturalize convention, he heightens our sense of artificiality. In verbal and visual allusions, Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* appears throughout, as does, we assume, the now lost *Ur-Hamlet*. Although the idea for the ghastly paternal banquet or for adding it to an already full canvas of revenge incident may have come from Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, to which he also alludes, Marston returns to Seneca's *Thyestes* (as well as, to a lesser extent, *Medea* and *Octavia*) and borrows or inventively transposes, sometimes in Latin, phrases and speeches from throughout this archetypal revenge drama. Also in the background lies Christopher Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, both its unorthodox fusion of vitriolic satire and knockabout comedy and, as a model for Marston's tyrant Piero, Marlowe's Barabas, at once ruthless Machiavellian egoist and vaudeville clown.

Every parodic aspect of *Antonio and Mellida*, not just the external allusion, is heightened in *Antonio's Revenge*. The dramatic poles of violent action and stoic passivity, impassioned rhetoric and prosaic comedy, are more extreme yet also more tightly yoked in *Part 2*'s firmer structure, and their unpredictable confrontations produce even more unsettling self-commentary. Before Piero murders him in a trick reminiscent of *The Spanish Tragedy*, the tool-villain Strotzo repeatedly mocks his master's exaggerated tyrant's rant. Balurdo as comic foil becomes more prominent, his deflating juxtaposition with the 'tragic' declamations of both Piero and Antonio more devastating. As in *Part 1*, Marston does not simply strain his theatrical illusion, he rends it. Antonio's hyperbolic despair at his father's death is met by Pandulpho's stoic invitation to sit and 'talk as chorus to this tragedy', and Piero later tells us that 'now *Tragoedia Cothurnata* mounts' (1.5.63; 2.5.45). In Act 2, scene 1 Balurdo enters complaining about his make-up, since his beard is only half glued on; when Pandulpho finally joins the revengers he reassesses his former philosophic equanimity as a theatrical role 'Like to some boy that acts a tragedy' (4.5.48).

Marston's dramaturgy ensures a certain aloofness from the passions that sweep his characters first one way, then another. The disengagement that allows us to appreciate witty allusion and downright pilfering also prepares us for the philosophic as well as generic challenge in Marston's final twist:

⁵ On Marston's use of contemporary revenge plays, especially Kyd's, see Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy*, pp. 118–19, and Foakes, 'John Marston's fantastical plays'.

instead of dying in the confused mêlée of their torture and execution of Piero, Marston's revengers survive. More surprising still, despite the ghost's blessing and the Venetian senators' approval, these disillusioned justicers find their own deed insupportable, for it has shown them their entanglement in the whole mad, depraved world exposed by the play's events. *Antonio's Revenge* ends not with the expected coda celebrating the defeat of evil and restoration of order, but with the revengers' choice of monastic seclusion and a lifetime of atonement.

Out of a pastiche of classical and contemporary plays Marston creates a compendium of revenge tragedy, one that calls attention to its constructed nature. Such a procedure exaggerates the distance between stage and reality; we are forced to recognize how much an unreflective use of convention excludes. The emphasis on artificiality, underscored by repeated reference to its theatrical enactment by boys, enables Marston to present a double critique – both of the genre he has placed before us, and of his own play – and to offer a version that incorporates the conventions of its models while it also, in breaking them, becomes something new.

With such sophisticated parody Marston established himself theatrically as a distinctive critical voice and advertised the repertoire of his troupe as avant-garde and fresh. An even bolder adapter of conventional materials to new ends, Francis Beaumont in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (c. 1607) fashioned for the Blackfriars boys a burlesque of the kind of citizen-adventure play popularized by Thomas Heywood at theatres like the Curtain and Red Bull. In this case, the dramatist's interest in probing and extending his medium exploded the borrowed form: Beaumont created something very different and modern, but also a baffled first audience and a commercial failure.

Initially, the topical social and literary satire seems rather straightforward, private-theatre ridicule of the inept, socially offensive glorification of citizen achievements by hack dramatists, as well as the ill-educated audience to which they pandered. Dissatisfied with the Blackfriars offering of the day, a city comedy called 'The London Merchant' that they rightly suspect will mock their class and values, a grocer and his wife climb onto the stage to sit among the gallants and demand a play more to their taste. Compromising with the boy-Prologue, the citizens allow the official play to go on if it will accommodate their impromptu, self-aggrandizing creation, 'The Grocer's Honour' (maliciously renamed by the boy 'The Knight of the Burning Pestle'), starring their own apprentice Rafe. The grocer's list of the plays he would prefer and willingness to pay for the flattery he wants ('I will have a grocer and he shall do admirable things' Induction, 334), as well as Rafe's audition with Hotspur's speech on honour from *Henry IV, Part 1* (and later use

of *The Spanish Tragedy*), suggest the corruption of art by commerce and a debasement both of heroic ideals and the dramatic forms associated with them. The citizens' continued interruptions, their demand to see Rafe whenever they want and even that he intervene in 'The London Merchant', their imperviousness to the boy's pleas for dramatic decorum or plot coherence, and their delight in a mishmash of typical romance episodes further indict their aesthetic and moral sensibility.

Yet Beaumont's play does not continue as it began. His interest, like Marston's, is also metadramatic, and expanding the Induction's on-stage 'audience' allows him scope to explore other facets of the theatrical experience. Particular satire is largely left behind as *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* turns to investigating how the theatre and its conventions try to capture and direct the audience's eager but unruly imagination. The citizens' naïve misapprehensions, not just their interruptions, defeat the smooth progress of the professional play: real-world judgements about runaway apprentices and daughters who refuse their fathers' choice of husbands negate the values conventionally assigned these characters and situations. The wife stops the play to comment on the child actors or offer homely remedies for fictional chilblains; when she does pay attention, she wrongly admires the vapid 'aristocratic' rhetoric of the doltish suitor, cannot foresee the lovers' final union, and wants to call the London Watch when the story threatens violence.

The citizens' untutored reactions and attempt to create their own play make them comic butts but also heighten our consciousness of plays as artistic mechanisms, contrived structures that rely on learned conventions and a whole set of social assumptions about the nature of the theatre itself. Beaumont has fun with the wife's censure of Merrythought, the prodigal father in 'The London Merchant', for she knows the value of 'a penny i' th' purse while I live' (376); she can no more see this apostle of good fellowship and philosophic 'mirth' as the play's comic ideal than she can tell good suitor from bad. She is also right. Merrythought's value is a literary and dramatic one. As festive spirit of misrule, his singing humour fills the play with snatches of contemporary ballads, and he is structurally necessary to the comic conclusion. At the same time, his total refusal of responsibility would be intolerable outside his conventionally defined role.

Beaumont's play appears to be all conflict – art vs. life, satire vs. carnivalesque celebration, structured drama vs. chaos, gentlemen-spectators and actors vs. citizens, the playhouse comedy vs. the 'story' of Rafe's adventures that ends in his death. In fact, Beaumont's discordant elements do cohere. Despite their shortcomings as audience, his citizens are no

puritan censors, demanding an end to playing. They are Beaumont's lords of misrule, who liberate other examples of spontaneous playmaking in the players and, especially, Rafe; they are also Beaumont's agents of unity. Apparent contradictions repeatedly collapse or assume a wholly new perspective. In the last episodes, city comedy and Rafe's romance establish a surprising *rapprochement* of spirit. Moreover, although the citizens seem untouched by Merrythought's life-enhancing ethic, the comic pattern is fulfilled in the epilogue when the wife invites the gentlemen-spectators to her house for wine and the tobacco she earlier denounced. Beaumont has found an encompassing tone, but his own work certainly lacks the conventionality of its two interior playlets. Clashing types and plot lines constantly redefine our response, and the citizens burst in unpredictably with their own insistent reality. Any single authorial stance evaporates under the play's shifting point of view.

The Knight of the Burning Pestle's failure in its own time is less significant than its existence, one index of the range of experimentation that distinguished the early seventeenth century on the public stage, for a Shakespeare or a Jonson, as well as in the private houses. Marston and Beaumont borrow common generic materials for their early plays, but through exaggeration and the sharp juxtaposition of different sets of conventions, they fracture a conventional response and demolish the hold a single genre usually exercises. Distinctions collapse while dissonance increases; the audience cannot remain passive, for the initially familiar materials are put to unexpected uses. Given their taste for creating new plays by subverting established ones, it is not surprising that Marston and Beaumont should challenge the traditional separation and hierarchy of genres. With very different plays, each helped establish what was to become the century's most popular dramatic form, tragicomedy.

The appearance of tragicomedy in the early seventeenth century was not solely the work of these two playwrights, of course, nor was mixing comic and tragic elements new. What A. P. Rossiter called 'the play in two tones', characteristic of England's peculiarly 'gothic' drama from its beginnings, in the 1560s and 1570s produced a number of plays advertising themselves as 'A Lamentable Tragedy mixed full of pleasant mirth' (*Cambises*) or, in the term invented by Richard Edwards for the prologue to *Damon and Pithias*, 'tragical comedy'.⁶ Dramatically crude, these early plays earned Sir Philip Sidney's condemnation in *The Defence of Poesie* as 'neither right tragedies, nor right comedies' but merely basely conceived 'mongrel tragi-comedy'.

⁶ Rossiter, *English Drama*, chapter 10 and epilogue.

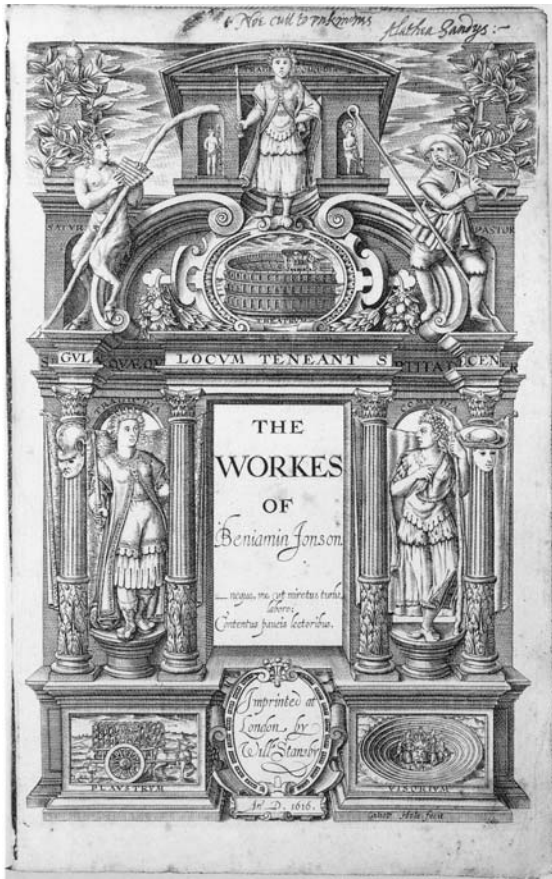
In the late 1580s and 1590s, Sidney's ideal was not rigorously pursued, but distinctions were by and large preserved. Despite a tendency to mix generic elements in practice, even as boldly as Robert Greene in *James IV* or Marlowe in *The Jew of Malta*, English playwrights and critics seem not to have recognized tragicomedy as a distinct dramatic species.

At the century's turn, the iconoclastic use of old plays and rhetorical styles coexists with other ventures in creating new dramatic 'kinds'. In the private theatre, 'comical satire' and then city comedy offered one reaction to the Petrarchan idealization of Elizabethan romantic comedy; generic revision and emphasis on the lower end of the social scale opened excluded areas of contemporary experience – and tension – to theatrical representation. In formal terms, tragicomedy's structure is comic, and it is most fruitfully seen as a transformation that would free romantic comedy itself to include the kinds of experience, personal relationships and philosophic questioning formerly associated with its generic opposite.⁷

Continental developments spurred interest in tragicomedy as a distinct form with English possibilities. Giambattista Guarini's controversial pastoral tragicomedy, *Il Pastor Fido*, had been available in London since 1591, but in 1602 its final revised form appeared in English translation, bound now with the *Compendio della poesia tragicomica*, in which Guarini defends his apparent violation of artistic decorum as a respectable genre in its own right. Guarini's play found few English imitators; its challenge to accepted categories, however, prompted some inventive native responses. In early experiments by Marston, Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, the English 'mixed mode' is more self-consciously extended; practice is raised to the theoretical level and claims recognition as genre.

The main line of English tragicomedy appears so unlike the Italian because it discards Guarini's apolitical shepherds and rethinks the form's emphasis. Italian pastoral tragicomedy defended itself as a re-creation of the Greek satyr play, thus claiming as respectable a genealogy as comedy and tragedy. That the English understood tragicomedy's protagonists to be as legitimately satyrs as shepherds is illustrated by the engraved title-page to Ben Jonson's 1616 *Workes*, where *Tragicomoedia* is supported equally by *Pastor* and *Satyr* (Plate 20). The common, erroneous derivation of 'satire' from 'satyr' – a being distinguished by rough style as well as skin, associated with rude jokes and personal attacks – suggests just how far from Arcadia tragicomedy might wander. Emphasizing *Satyr* rather than *Pastor* for English writers allied tragicomedy with the 1590s world of topical, urban, social, and

⁷ Cf. R. A. Foakes, 'Tragicomedy and comic form' in Braunmuller and Bulman, eds., *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, pp. 74–6.



20 Title-page to Ben Jonson's 1616 *Workes*

moral verse satire.⁸ To varying degrees, English tragicomic authors locate the new form's focus on love and private relations within satirically anatomized social and political worlds.

The Malcontent (1603–4) emphatically seizes on the *Satyr* implications. Marston's tragicomedy in one sense grows naturally out of his early verse satire and fondness for radical dramatic experiment, already suggestively linked in the thematic issues and generic juxtapositions of the Antonio plays. *The Malcontent's* numerous quotations from the 1602 translation also

⁸ G. K. Hunter, 'Italian tragicomedy on the English stage', reprinted in *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition* (Liverpool, 1978), pp. 141–5, and for a more general account of Renaissance tragicomedy, Waith, *The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher*, pp. 43–70.



21 Mendoza (Joe Dixon) bribes Altofront, disguised as Malevole (Antony Sher), in the 2002 Swan Theatre production of *The Malcontent*

establish Marston's familiarity with *Il Pastor Fido*; that he may have been self-consciously recasting the new form to English taste appears in Marston's own hesitant designation of his play. In the epistle to the printed text he calls it 'this comedy' and asks that it 'pass with the freedom of a satire'; in the Stationers' Register the play is entered as 'An Enterlude called the Malecontent Tragico-moedia'. Guarini is superficially acknowledged in quotation, but absorbed at the fundamental level of form; Marston freely pursues his own interests.

In *The Malcontent*, Marston uses pastoral tragicomedy's principal concern, faithful and unfaithful love, to refashion revenge tragedy more positively than in *Antonio's Revenge*. Political restoration for the deposed Altofront, disguised as a malcontent tool-villain, depends in part on benevolent chance; it also springs from the witty manoeuvrings by which Malevole finally converts the original usurper, Pietro, and outwits his successor, Mendoza. Families as well as dukedoms are restored and, regaining his political identity, Altofront is reunited with his duchess Maria, imprisoned under Mendoza's tyranny. Although the play appears dominated by political plots and Malevole's satiric commentary, Maria is in fact central to the final sense of stability. In refusing Mendoza's proxy courtship, her sexual as well as political fidelity provides a hopeful counter to Pietro's lascivious Duchess Aurelia (unfaithful mistress to Mendoza). Maria breaks the pattern

by which each new political aspirant establishes his position through seducing his rival's wife. Mendoza can be expelled rather than executed because his intended murders have misfired, but also because a whole moral as well as political order has been restored with the rule of Altofront and Maria.

Early on Malevole tells us his desired revenge is not death but the 'heart's disquiet' (1.3.158). Psychological torment more than punishes Pietro; by the end of Act 4 it convinces him to renounce power and enact in deed his holy hermit disguise. But these cues for a non-tragic ending are strained by what goes on between them, and *The Malcontent* severely tests its tragicomic structure. Mendoza's intentions are murderous, and this Senecan villain seems a natural product of the world Marston anatomizes. Almost everywhere he turns, Malevole finds vice as well as folly from a fickle populace, through court fops and toadies eagerly seeking the usurper's favour, to the insidious union of sex and politics in the shifting power relations among princes. The speech that completes Pietro's conversion is both calculated, part of Altofront's political strategy to regain his dukedom, and a horrified epitome of what he has learned as Malevole: the earth is a graveyard in which all transient things rot, man no more than 'the slime of this dung-pit', and rulers merely 'jailers' charged with keeping naturally vicious men 'in bonds' (4.5.110–21). The play has provided a good deal of support for this climactic set-speech on human depravity, and Pietro's stoic renunciation seems appropriate. Unlike Antonio or Pietro, however, Altofront–Malevole is disillusioned but not unhinged by this knowledge, and he has yet to discover Maria's fidelity, the captain's loyalty, and the 'whirl of fate' by which the people now support him and events conspire to restore him to office. The world of *The Malcontent* finally proves not so dark as the *contemptus mundi* vision at its heart, but the power of that vision lingers to qualify our response to the final restorations.

The successful introduction into one genre of subject matter and techniques from its theoretical opposite is easier hypothesized than accomplished. In practice, the necessary balancing act proved easily upset by local emphases, a unifying tone for such disparate material hard to establish. However effectively *The Malcontent* controls its hybrid elements, that success rests on the more bewildering juxtapositions of the Antonio plays, just as Shakespeare's late tragicomedies follow such diverse experiments as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*. The distinctive 'Beaumont and Fletcher' tragicomedy that proved an influential model for the rest of the century reveals another such chequered past. After the failure of *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, clearly comedy, but beyond that unique, Beaumont next collaborated with John Fletcher on a tragedy drawn from aristocratic pastoral romance. To the two stories lifted from Sidney's *Arcadia* and with a death-count

rivalling *Hamlet*'s, however, *Cupid's Revenge* (1608) adds scenes and techniques of characterization derived from satiric city comedy that undermine the play's focus and inhibit any sense of tragic inevitability. *Cupid's Revenge* strives, against genre, to be something else; though apparently commercially successful with this play, Beaumont and Fletcher do not repeat its form.⁹

What they found truly congenial in Sidney lay at a more fundamental level than plot, and some features of his romance lingered to help shape the pattern of later collaborations and explain why their 'Englishing' of the tragicomic form should prove so different from Marston's. They develop their own version of Sidney's partly pastoral, partly aristocratic milieu, and they learn what Sidney himself discovered in revising his own work: a 'timeless' thematic structure, allowing for sharp contrast between kinds of scenes, replaces plot as the primary organizing principle. Finally, Beaumont and Fletcher continued to seek dramatic expression for Sidney's witty, sophisticated, self-mocking narrative tone.

The aesthetic advance that marks *Philaster* (1609) derives from a bolder reshaping of this material, but also from Fletcher's pastoral tragicomedy *The Faithful Shepherdess*, probably written the same year as *Cupid's Revenge*.¹⁰ Fletcher models his title on Guarini's and chooses the same dramatic mode, but his play is strikingly different and its other debts are English. Working within a unifying pastoralism, Fletcher transmutes material that had proved disruptive in *Cupid's Revenge* into a more clearly articulated and controlled generic blend. Some of the main character-types reappear, arranged now in a hierarchy that measures its lovers' moral stature against the spiritual devotion of Clorin, the title-character whose chastity is a living memorial to her dead shepherd. Fletcher's slender plot is his own, designed to provide a shifting configuration of lovers rather than a true narrative sequence. Each shepherd's nature is established early, as he or she arrives in the wood; Fletcher then moves them through all possible permutations, confrontations, and misunderstandings until each has found the proper mate or been deemed unfit for marriage, and the forest Satyr is left to serve the solitary Clorin.

Fletcher's thematic patterning may have been inspired by Sidney and Book III of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; the structural advance over *Cupid's Revenge* begins with a narrowed scope (temporally, and in the smaller cast's integration into a single plot) and the adoption of a dramatic model, the 'magical woods' scenes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In tone, too, Shakespeare

⁹ John H. Astington, in 'The popularity of *Cupid's Revenge*', argues for this success and suggests it as the reason the King's Men engaged Beaumont and Fletcher immediately, despite individual failures, in 1608–9 (*SEL* 19 [1979], esp. 218–19).

¹⁰ On the links among these three plays, see Bliss, *Francis Beaumont*, chapter 4; on *The Faithful Shepherdess*, the same author's 'Defending Fletcher's shepherds'.

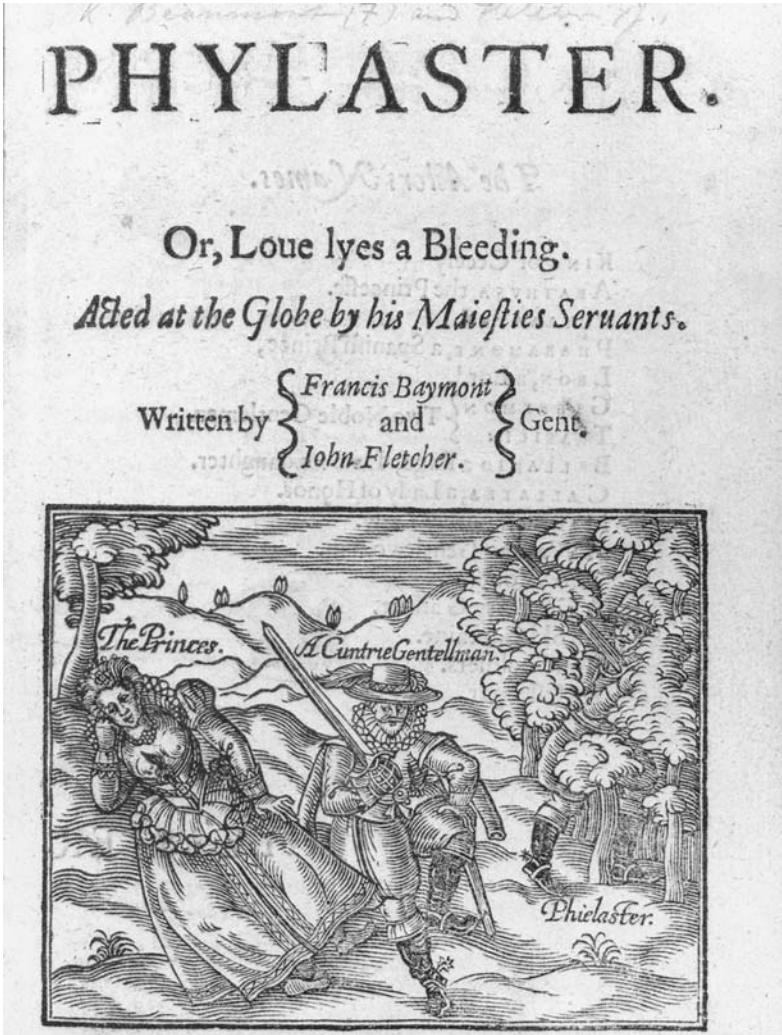
here reinforces Sidney. The final effect of Fletcher's delicate combination of gods and shepherds, lyricism and earthy humour, threatened loss and (in the middle section) farce, is a sophisticated double view of love. We are made to see and respond to love's unique importance, its power to make every obstacle tragically significant; we are asked also to share the dramatist's appreciation – acknowledged over the heads of his characters – of humankind's mortal folly in love. Exaggeration and poetic stylization make the characters' purposefully heightened emotions simultaneously both real and remote.

In *The Faithful Shepherdess* Fletcher learns to introduce tragic potential while subordinating it to comedy's final reconciliations. He discovers in practice what the printed text's 'To the Reader' (c. 1610) defends in theory: tragicomedy is seen as a sophisticated marriage of genres that results not in the awkward yoking that Sidney scorned but in a new genre with its own distinctive style and effect. The commercial failure of his play may have stemmed from Fletcher's uncompromising pastoralism; despite some stage-worthy surprises (the River God's rising from a well with the supposed-dead Amoret in his arms; the confused young lover Perigot's twice stabbing his beloved), perhaps the emphasis on love debate and lack of a fully developed plot were more than even a Blackfriars audience could take to its heart. Fletcher blamed his audience's ignorance of the play's form, and his anger produced the first theoretical defence of tragicomedy in English. Adapting Guarini's *Compendio*, Fletcher defines the new genre's latitude in subject matter, character, and style:

A tragicomedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned, so that a god is as lawful in this as in tragedy, and mean people as in comedy.

Fletcher helped both to establish the term as part of the English critical vocabulary and to legitimize tragicomedy as a valid theatrical form.

Philaster demonstrates the lessons learned. Fletcher's pastoralism finds its place in the lyric despair of the lovers, a hunting scene that now juxtaposes earthy rustics with exquisitely refined aristocrats but within a larger scheme of political usurpation and restoration. Various developments, however tonally different from each other, all retard or advance one overarching plot line. The characteristic tragicomic vision may derive largely from prose romance, but the successful and influential form discovered with *Philaster* results from re-examining and reworking theatrical practice. Marston's tragicomedy is certainly in the background, as is the distraught Antonio. In their first play for the King's Men, however, the young dramatists find their own



22 Title-page to 1620 edition of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*

way and, in the process, elect Shakespearean exemplars – *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night* – for the kinds of plays out of which their own mixed mode will be built.

Philaster is neither pastiche nor parody. A thorough transmutation of Shakespeare guides the play's general shape; within this structure, Beaumont and Fletcher discover the local balance of discordant tones and perspectives that gives their tragicomedy its self-reflexive quality and curious power to elicit almost simultaneous engagement and detachment. The satiric comedy

so destructive to *Cupid's Revenge* returns, aptly, to help define the corrupt world within which the prince and his beloved Arethusa seek to establish a private haven. More surprisingly, it also qualifies our response to the exquisitely sensitive young lovers themselves. Lord Dion and his friends open the play as political and moral commentators; they establish a cynical, 'realistic' voice – about politics, love, the vulgar populace – that, in various characters and scenes, forms one of *Philaster's* competing views of its own action.

Against this background *Philaster*, Arethusa, and the maligned page Bellario must maintain the signal importance of their love for and fidelity to each other. For most of Acts 3 and 4 the play suspends its forward movement to explore the psychological havoc wrought by *Philaster's* doubt of both mistress and page; adopting the structure of Fletcher's tragicomedy, the dramatists move their despairing principals through every possible emotionally charged confrontation. Yet even in the carefully orchestrated sequence leading to *Philaster's* stabbing both Arethusa and Bellario, the playwrights do not allow the heightened language and emotion wholly to control our response. Interspersed scenes force upon us the courtiers' and Woodmen's bawdy comic prose, or Dion's sudden political confrontation with the king; they disturb our sense of developing tragedy. Arethusa, *Philaster*, and Bellario may here seem to have stepped out of *The Faithful Shepherdess* (even the stabbing is borrowed), but they are not granted the supporting generic backdrop. In the play's boldest juxtaposition, Beaumont and Fletcher allow that outer world to invade and challenge the lovers' apparently separate realm of pastoral romance. As *Philaster* stabs the willing Arethusa, they are interrupted not by a lovelorn shepherd but by the Country Fellow's comic turn. Berated for his 'ill-bred' intrusion on their 'private sports', this stolid rustic provides a common-sense perspective outside the conventions of language, emotion, and action that created the scene he has stumbled into: 'I know not your rhetoric, but I can lay it on if you touch the woman' (4.5.97–8).

The passionate heart of *Philaster* lies in the lovers' response to an apparent betrayal of love, their entry into a private nightmare of such extreme despair and self-alienation that each seeks death. That emotional pitch is also 'placed', by the treatment of the lovers themselves and by the principle of alternation and contrast that refuses them, or their private drama, the isolation they seek. The competing perspectives do not cancel each other out; we participate in both. The Country Fellow releases us from *Philaster's* claustrophobic hysteria and, for a moment, turns us back into amused spectators. No longer asked wholly to adopt the lovers' valuation of their predicament, we find the distance appropriate to a play that will reverse its apparently fatal

trajectory and, through a citizen uprising and the discovery of Bellario's true identity, restore harmony to both public and private worlds.

This self-reflexive juxtaposition of perspectives and unsettling combination of conventions and characters from different kinds of plays also appear in Beaumont and Fletcher's last joint tragicomedy, *A King and No King* (1611), although the delicate generic balance that marked *Philaster* tips now toward the comic emphasis Fletcher seemed to find more congenial. In spirit, *A King and No King* approaches the kind of tragicomedy Fletcher was later to purvey, alone and with other collaborators, and it looks more squarely toward later English practice in both tragicomedy and heroic drama.

Instead of creating a multifaceted view of character and event, satiric and romantic perspectives clash in ways that more nearly cancel each other out. So, too, the romance discoveries are fundamentally different. When Bellario reveals she is a woman, she allows *Philaster* to end happily instead of doubling back on itself to repeat Arethusa's persecution; the revelation does not negate the problem of distinguishing appearance from reality or cancel Philaster's inability to believe Arethusa's innocence. In *A King and No King*'s tale of King Arbaces' apparently incestuous love for his sister Panthea, resolution comes when Arbaces finds he is really son to Gobrius, not the princess's brother. The terror occasioned by an experience of uncontrollable passion that threatens civilized institutions seems erased when that passion is redefined as the normal love-at-first-sight attraction of a legitimate romantic couple. The new range of intellectual and emotional possibilities to which tragicomedy had seemed to open the comic form is here almost wholly closed off again in the reassuring denouement.

A King and No King has not quite completed this passage. The violence of Arbaces' passion still disturbs, since he feels that if he cannot marry Panthea he must rape her. Such love may be legitimated, but it cannot be retroactively idealized as ennobling devotion. The play repeatedly undercuts its protagonist, even while it asks us to pity and, in part, admire him. Good counsellor and spokesman for Arbaces' virtues, Mardonius also mocks his king's hubristic speeches. A more dramatically conceived foil is Bessus, the cowardly, amoral captain who would seem the warrior-monarch's opposite but is at times tellingly made his double. Bessus is largely relegated to the farcical sub-plot, but his efforts to redefine his cowardice as 'honour' link him with Arbaces' more disturbing attempt to deny, by royal fiat, that Panthea is his sister. The darker implications of Bessus' amorality penetrate the main plot when he cheerfully offers to procure his monarch's sister, indeed his mother, if Arbaces wants her also. Here the laughter Bessus provokes is not normative; his effect is unlike the Country Fellow's in *Philaster*. Though concerned with reputation and appearances, Bessus stands outside the moral

order, and his buffoonery brackets major scenes of strained interaction or passionate self-denunciation. Elsewhere, too, the heightened rhetoric of the main plot's confrontation with issues of human bestiality and the betrayal of honour is crosscut with voices that assert more mundane concerns and public indifference. In the tiny, wholly extraneous Act 2, scene 2, for instance, several rowdy citizens hilariously misinterpret Arbaces' triumphal homecoming speech.

Other elements of *A King and No King* contribute to its distancing of characters as well as issues. Although Arbaces obviously extends the line of young men tormented by life's contradictions, he lacks Philaster's comparative centrality and complexity, and he must share his stage with Tigranes and Spaconia, who constitute another strand of the main plot's investigation of aristocratic love and honour. All Beaumont and Fletcher's plays employ external characterization, but with Arbaces it remains the dominant mode; even after the opening evaluations, Mardonius continues to define and interpret his king. An extraordinarily heavy use of the 'aside' further checks our involvement in any single individual's plight. Dramatic focus blurs when, in a crowded public scene such as Act 3, scene 1, our attention is repeatedly shifted from the ongoing action to one or another character's private response to it. Finally, although both Arbaces and Tigranes demonstrate passion's arbitrary power over even the best human intentions, the more sensational form of this threat self-destructs when Arbaces finds that the answer to his demand to 'tell me who I am' need only be genealogical.

The play's challenge to traditional ideas about man's nature, its hints of a wild, Hobbesian universe, are muffled. Our attention is directed to the brilliant artifice of *A King and No King*'s construction and, at the end, we even discover the dramatists have playfully included their own surrogate. With Gobrius' revelations we retroactively see both problem and solution as largely the product of his manipulations; like any tragicomic playwright, he knows that timing is all: 'Now it is ripe... Now is the time' (5.4.65, 108). Only when passion and confusion have reached an unendurable level will full disclosure have its greatest theatrical impact.

The sophisticated self-consciousness that asks us to share, finally, the artist's urbane distance rather than his characters' amorous involvement met an appreciative reception. Beaumont and Fletcher's skill in fashioning the turns and counter-turns of a continually exciting plot, as well as their characters' amorous dilemmas and impassioned rhetoric, were consistently praised and imitated. Contemporary taste is suggested by *Philaster*'s subtitle, 'Love lies ableeding' (used as sole reference as early as 1610), and by the title-page woodcut of the 1620 quarto depicting the climactic scene's mixture of erotic violence and rustic incomprehension (Plate 22).

The celebration of theatrical artifice, as well as an attraction to romance materials, link Beaumont and Fletcher with the colleague from whose earlier work they borrowed so much. Through the 'Calumniated Woman' motif, both *Philaster* and Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* (c. 1609) also dramatize the experience of love threatened by ungovernable jealousy, of self-betrayal and suicidal despair, and of a final recovery of self and place that can be re-inscribed within a political world no longer inimical to human desire. Shakespeare widens the scope of his investigation, however: beyond the personal significance of romantic love, he is concerned with families as the social structures that mediate between private and public worlds and give the individual an identity rooted in time. The Posthumus–Imogen plot closely resembles *Philaster*, but the story of kidnapped princes introduces a sudden sense of family history, and the dreaming Posthumus discovers the parents and brothers he never knew when their spirits arrive to defend him. This widened scope extends from the fairytale extremes of good and evil characters to the geographical sprawl of the action and generic variety of the sources from which that action is constructed. The welter of significant characters engaged in proliferating plots further disperses the dramatic focus. In a technique shared with Beaumont and Fletcher, sudden alterations in perspective enhance a sense of mounting tension and confusion while also regulating our involvement with individual characters. When Imogen awakes next to the headless body she identifies as her husband's, *Cymbeline* insists on both the tragic intensity of her despair and the grotesque comedy of her mistake, since she in fact mourns over the corpse of the dead villain, Cloten.

In reminding us of our privileged view and drawing attention to the frankly theatrical coincidences by which they avert tragedy, these dramatists admit their artifice and ask our recognition of it as part of the plays' appeal. Yet where Beaumont and Fletcher point us to the world of art and the men who shape and enjoy such fictions, Shakespeare is finally more self-effacing. *Cymbeline*'s competing perspectives dissolve as the characters converge on Cymbeline's court to find themselves and their place among loved ones thought lost; jarring shifts among scenes from Italian intrigue comedy, chronicle history, and pastoral tragedy culminate in the surprise descent of the god Jupiter. The comically drawn-out final scene of revelations and restorations then subsumes all characters, events, and genres under romance's banner. Individual voices blend to become partial narrators of the larger, intricately interwoven story we have seen, and the characters' wonder at the apparent miracle by which they have fulfilled Jupiter's riddling prophecy is matched by ours, as we watch Shakespeare disappear behind the cosmic playwright

whose art he mirrors.¹¹ In *Philaster* and *A King and No King* the gods and miraculous landscape of earlier plays disappear; in *Cymbeline* the gods are immanent and guarantee a final stability and harmony more sweeping than that offered by Beaumont and Fletcher.¹²

Beaumont and Fletcher provide no final, comprehensive transformation. The dissonant note of minor characters who resist the call to love, honour, and forgiveness remains, even at the end, and reminds us of the dramatists' early alliance with the children's companies and the influence of satiric comedy as well as Shakespeare. They belong to, and write to entertain, a generation experiencing the breakdown of a whole system of integrated beliefs and practices. If Shakespearian tragicomedy accepts the premises of romance and reasserts that order in idealized form, Beaumont and Fletcher's finds disjunction. While conventions of plot, incident, and characterization provide a romance patina, they function as literary and theatrical counters stripped of metonymic weight. This darker side, a hinted fragmentation rather than consensus of values beneath the formal solutions, suggests at least subterranean links between their work and John Webster's *The Devil's Law-Case*, a play that at first glance seems to reject developments by Beaumont, Fletcher, and Shakespeare in order to return to Marston and Marlowe.¹³

Like Marston, Webster emphasizes the *Satyr* genealogy for a play the 1623 quarto calls 'Tragecomoedy', although the biting wit and aphoristic commentary appropriate to Malevole's malcontent role belong, in *The Devil's Law-Case*, not just to the cynical merchant-protagonist Romelio but to nearly everyone. Repeatedly, censure of a particular crime dilates to include a whole class or profession; even idealistic *sententiae* often function satirically, condemning the speakers who use them to mask self-interested manoeuvring. Such gnomic generalization distances us from the immediate action, but also darkens it by translating individual folly or vice into permanent, 'natural' human characteristics; it exalts not the innocent victims, but those who outwit their opponents. In *The Malcontent*, the Altofront-Malevole frame mitigates the impact of a foolish, knavish court: the moralist stands between us and the action, verbally controlling the viciousness he denounces, while the tragicomic plot frustrates murderous intentions until power and morality can be reunited. Romelio is less central to his play, and he provides no moral centre. Webster chooses as his model Marlowe's Machiavellian

¹¹ See also Kirsch, *Jacobean Dramatic Perspectives*, pp. 73–4.

¹² For a fuller comparison, see Bliss, 'Tragicomic romance for the King's Men, 1609–1611' in Braummüller and Bulman, eds., *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, pp. 148–64.

¹³ Despite the usual assumption of 1617, *The Devil's Law-Case* may have been composed a good deal earlier; Bentley argues for c.1610 in *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, V, 1250–1.

Jew: Romelio is dedicated to using everyone, including his sister Jolenta, for his own advantage.

In *The Devil's Law-Case* situations and characters change – or reveal new facets – with lightning rapidity, and the pace of plot and counter-plot becomes vertiginous. No one controls the action or our perspective on it, and the smooth social surface of the play's opening soon disintegrates under the anarchic amatory and economic passions that fuel individual schemes. Characters remain flat but intense, as they channel their violent energies to the narrow roles dictated by the evolving plots. The tendency to turn serious matters, even their own suffering, into material for sardonic jests – as Jolenta does when in Act 3, scene 3 she agrees to aid Romelio, despite his role in the apparent death of her lover – helps push the play toward grotesque farce.

Dissonance among the play's constituent elements enhances the impression of extreme dislocation. Nodding, perhaps, toward the popularity of romantic tragicomedy, Webster introduces two high-minded noble suitors, but their Petrarchan wooing and honourable duel over Jolenta must coexist with Julio's bawdy commentary, the surrounding manoeuvres of self-made entrepreneurs of law and business, and a world in which mothers declare their sons illegitimate and pregnant nuns seek to avoid disgrace. In their stiff rhetoric, rigid code of honour, and blindness to others' motives, Ercole and Contarino might have stepped out of a Beaumont–Fletcher play, but they lack the prominence or context that would give them weight as representatives of idealism and nobility of feeling.

Webster presents an unstable compound of clashing character types and generic signals: the play's focus is as scattered as that of the lawyer Crispiano, sent by the king to investigate Romelio's economic crimes but also 'What mad tricks has been played of late by ladies' (3.1.9). Whenever the play seems to have taken a decisive turn toward disaster or concord, a new scene and another stratagem reverse our expectation. The means by which this madly spinning top is brought under control are as improbable as its characters' schemes. Romelio's sudden moral conversion and the final pairing of some very unlikely couples abruptly halt the frantic rush of events. One of the few upright characters, Ariosto, in the last lines dispenses wise judgements and advice, but he has not created this happy resolution. If events demonstrate heaven's power to 'invert man's firmest purpose' (5.5.14), as the Capuchin claims, heaven is shown to have little but human self-destructiveness to work with. Pitting plot against counter-plot temporarily frustrates bad intentions, but the aggressive, egoistic energy behind them can be tamed only by a barefaced imposition of comic convention. Webster's dénouement

stresses the genre's inadequacy, not its elegance or the way a controlled balancing of elements can give the engineered ending its own sense of dramatic rightness.

Pursuing a different formal tack, Middleton and Rowley's *A Fair Quarrel* (1615–17) reveals the strong influence of Beaumont and Fletcher's tragicomic dramaturgy, particularly as Fletcher developed it after Beaumont's early retirement. In tragicomedies and comedies like *The Honest Man's Fortune* (1613) and *Monsieur Thomas* (1615), Fletcher drops the political component of earlier plays and extends *A King and No King's* tendency to stratify its plots by social class and genre. Middleton and Rowley accept this taming of tragicomedy's disruptive potential, though between the 'high' plot's exquisite moral dilemmas and investigation of the meaning of honour, and Chough's and Trimtram's efforts to learn the language and behaviour of roaring boys, the dramatists introduce a third term: the middle-class world in which Jane seeks approval for her love-marriage from Russell, a father whose wholly economic values require that she marry wealth.

A Fair Quarrel shapes material from disparate sources into a thematically unified whole whose alternating plot lines comment on each other without bringing their value systems into open confrontation.¹⁴ Jane's citizen sense of honour – her decision to remain true to her secret marriage even at the cost of her reputation – balances the satiric treatment of her father's mercantile ethic. Her decision exemplifies, in domestic form, what the main plot's hot-headed Colonel and Captain Ager discover through the apparent death of the Colonel in their duel. Friendship and respect among equals are more important than public reputation; duelling is finally understood as a form of 'vengeance' that at best brings only a Pyrrhic victory, 'A miserable triumph, though a just one' (3.1.78). Chough's low-comedy antics ridicule false ideas of honour in the other two plots. Uniting this high-middle-low triple structure is the fact that, despite the threat of death, two of the three actions are recognizably comic from their inception, and the late addition of a main-plot sister, who will bind the Colonel and Ager not only as friends but as brothers-in-law, enhances our sense of a general convergence toward comedy's festive vision.

Middleton's other romantic tragicomedies fail to establish a harmonious balance among varied stories and conventions. Here, incorporating a main

¹⁴ R. V. Holdsworth discusses the dramatists' skilled transformation of their sources in his New Mermaids edition of *A Fair Quarrel*, pp. xv–xviii; on the play's sophisticated triadic plotting, see also Levin, *The Multiple Plot*, pp. 66–75, 153–4.

plot fashionably preoccupied with duelling and hence with definitions of honour, he avoids a total schism between its extreme passions and rhetoric and either the intrigue city comedy of Jane's final triumph or the farcical scenes of the would-be roaring boys. *A Fair Quarrel's* social concerns centre on manners, not on competing economic, political or class codes, though it may use such conflicts to build suspense. It dissolves contradictions in a new sense of honour and dramatizes a real, albeit gradual, seventeenth-century shift from a primarily feudal, aristocratic code to a concept that stressed inner worth and respect rather than competition among 'honourable' men.¹⁵ Here we find neither the unassimilable 'loose ends' of early Beaumont and Fletcher, those reminders of a world resistant to artistic convention or generic order, nor a self-conscious flaunting of the dramatist's arbitrary control. Yet while *A Fair Quarrel* works to establish communal values, it does so very differently from *Cymbeline*. Middleton and Rowley suggest no metaphysical implications for their action beyond asserting that right behaviour is also Christian behaviour, and they repeatedly smudge the hard edges that might have defined a real confrontation of philosophies embodied in the juxtaposed genres.

Unlike *The Devil's Law-Case*, which with the exception of Ercole and Contarino could have been written in the early years of James's reign, *A Fair Quarrel* is of its time and Janus-faced in both content and technique. The triple plotting looks back to Middleton's city comedy and, in the emphasis on romantic idealism, to the aristocratic love comedies of the 1590s. Translated into a tragicomic structure that widens the main-plot issues to include honour as well as love, while narrowing the social disparity among its plots' characters, *A Fair Quarrel* follows Fletcher's own development.

More than any early tragicomedy here considered, with the exception of *A King and No King*, *A Fair Quarrel* thus looks forward to later Caroline and Restoration practice. In part because the tragicomic situation is so extreme, characters become flatter – almost abstract spokesmen for their dilemmas – and more wholly a product of their rhetoric. Although city types familiar from earlier satiric comedies remain in the 'low' plot, any consistently satiric perspective has gone the way of the early plays' political concerns. This emphasis on good-natured comedy insulates us from the threat of tragedy and makes it more titillating than frightening; the comic plot slides into 'comic relief' and assures us nothing really serious is at stake. Like *The Honest Man's Fortune*, *A Fair Quarrel* leans toward a mixture of the sensational and the sentimental that earlier tragicomedies did not allow to go unexamined.

¹⁵ C. L. Barber, *The Idea of Honour in the English Drama, 1591–1700* (Gothenburg, 1957), pp. 330–6.

When no obstreperous, farcical perspective is allowed to 'contaminate' the rhetoric and assumed values of the heroic plot, the self-reflexive potential of even juxtaposed scenes shrinks to the less-demanding pleasures of variety offered by a simple alternation of moods. Violations of decorum are corrected, and, while in plot terms suspense may remain a goal, the handling of the dramatic materials no longer generates its own internal tensions.

Failures as well as successes dot the dramatic landscape of the early seventeenth century, but the principle of rebellion and reinvention is central. Since theatres were commercial ventures, individual assertion had to find a public voice that would satisfy changing taste and earn an audience. Formal experiments express a generation of writers seeking to define its own voice; these authors were also part of a generation of Englishmen becoming restive, in a larger sense, under the 'forms' – intellectual, social, religious, economic – of its inheritance. The challenge to the idea of literary hierarchies and distinctions among genres had social, political, and philosophical implications, and these innovative dramatists by and large found an enthusiastic public. In plays that indirectly explored the breakdown of the absolute authority of the aristocracy (for which heroic conventions and the high rhetorical style had been accepted as a natural expression), they called in question a traditional symbolic ordering of the world that supported rigid social as well as artistic categories.

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8

JILL LEVENSON

Comedy

FLOTE'S VOICE Oh, but, oh, a world ruled by seriousness alone is an old world, a grave, a graveyard world. Mirth makes the green sap rise and the wildebeest run mad.

Peter Barnes, *Red Noses* (1985)

Boundaries

At the start of a lecture on Shakespearian comedy and romance, Northrop Frye finds himself in a minority of critics, 'a somewhat furtive and anonymous group who have not much of a theory, implicit or explicit, to hold them together'.¹ This group has barely changed through the course of literary history. If reticence distinguishes current members, discontinuity has remained an invariable. Specifically, theories about comedy fail to connect not only with one another but with dramatic practice. As a result, no lexicon exists to define comedy in general or the Tudor and Stuart version in particular.

From humanists and puritans to the playwrights themselves, English Renaissance critics sporadically devised generic norms for comedy according to structure, content, and moral import. Most dramatists regularly ignored those norms, as they ignored the norms for tragedy, producing a genre irrepressible in its creative innovation and variety. Four centuries later modern scholarship has attempted to study this unfettered comedy by catching and fixing the plays in an assortment of matrices, paradigms, and systems. Often it categorizes Shakespearian and Jonsonian types, or romantic and satiric comedy. Yet these divisions break down almost at once for the critics who use them, as Madeleine Doran admits immediately after setting up the guidelines: 'these clear differences in emphasis are seldom maintained in English

¹ *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York, 1965), p. 2.

comedy with any purity'.² More promisingly, recent criticism has introduced the image of a spectrum in delineating Renaissance comedy as well as other genres. So G. K. Hunter views sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English comedy as 'a spectrum of comic forms running from the dynamic at one end to the static at the other', from farce to romance.³

Hunter's flexible concept and vocabulary define comedy in terms of the interaction between plot and character: plot dominates in farce, character in romance. While this terminology allows Renaissance comedy its range and consistencies, it does not fully explain the miscellaneousness of individual plays or the genre as a whole. For that crucial feature modern genre theory supplies helpful descriptive terms: Alastair Fowler describes a genre or 'kind' as 'a type of literary work of a definite size, marked by a complex of substantive and formal features that always include a distinctive (though not usually unique) external structure'. Since the Middle Ages, new genres have been composed from older ones: 'Either the new kind is a transformation of an existing one, or else it is assembled. Assembly, too, uses existing generic materials'. From the post-medieval kinds, Fowler singles out Renaissance comedy for the large repertoire of genres on which it drew:

It would require a separate book even to outline the assembly of the complex comic repertoire. But it should be plain already that Renaissance dramatists did not lack generic materials. Renaissance comedy was certainly a new kind. But it was not one created out of nothing by Lyly or Shakespeare or Jonson.⁴

The 'external structure' of English Renaissance comedy – the consecutive arrangement of its parts – derived from Roman models as the later age perceived them. In the 1530s humanist commentaries began to influence the way students understood the design of texts by Plautus and Terence; from the middle decades onwards, performances of Italian versions strengthened the impression of a distinct comic form. According to these renderings, comedy is a representation that progresses through time in two orderly sequences at once, a narrative and a rhetorical argument. The narrative moves forward in three phases whose proportions may vary: exposition and beginning of the action, complication of incidents, anastrophe or resolution. Typically this sequence commences with an error which leads to confusion finally dispelled in a happy ending. Meantime a series of debates argues a central question as well as subordinate issues. Renaissance comedy's structure therefore

² *Endeavors of Art*, p. 150.

³ 'Comedy, farce, romance' in Braunmuller and Bulman, eds., *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, p. 31.

⁴ *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 74, 156.

appears coherent from two points of view, however miscellaneous its other features may seem. Both viewpoints give events an ironic cast, as the audience observes characters whose behaviour indicates misunderstanding of their situations or the matters in question.⁵

This duplex construction could accommodate elements from a wide range of forms literary and non-literary, small and middle-sized. Of course it admitted other components of Latin or Italian–Latin comedies with their type characters and complicated intrigues. During its heyday in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it took in whole genres, from romance and satire to sonnet and epigram; it borrowed subgenres or modes; it incorporated theatrical conventions like the court masque; and it continued to admit the traditions of carnival or popular culture. When playwrights like Shakespeare or Jonson used it, Renaissance comedy even made space for native and contemporary dramatic kinds. But its artistic self-consciousness, part of its Roman legacy, remained incidental rather than structural. Comedy of this era thus kept a distance from extensive burlesque. In its inclusiveness and plasticity, it more closely resembled the protean novels of Rabelais and Cervantes.⁶ Many generic elements mingled within the host form, the myriad configurations producing a remarkable variety of individual comedies.

Early developments

During the Middle Ages and first half of the sixteenth century in England, most components of Renaissance comedy – even parts of its structure – floated free.⁷ Now and then a number of them clustered, as they did in some

⁵ In this paragraph on comedic structure and in the chapter generally, I have attempted to condense vast quantities of scholarship into lucid explanations. Notes indicate the materials which proved most significant, helpful, or provocative in coming to terms with such a complex genre. Accordingly, Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, pp. 60–1, should be cited here for his definition of ‘external structure’. Ruth Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare* (London and New York, 1980), refers to the tripartite narrative format and concisely documents relevant criticism; Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, offers a thorough discussion of rhetoric’s place in Renaissance comedy and other dramatic genres. ‘Anastrophe’ is Frye’s term, *A Natural Perspective*, pp. 72–3, instead of ‘catastrophe’, for the conclusion of a comedy.

⁶ The similarities become clear in M. M. Bakhtin’s analyses of the novel as a genre and the work of Rabelais and Cervantes. See *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex., 1981), and *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, Ind., 1984).

⁷ Michael Hattaway stresses the variety of these components in Part I of *Elizabethan Popular Theatre*, and François Laroque gives an exhaustive account of those deriving from festivals in *Shakespeare’s Festive World*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge, 1991). Both point out how the Elizabethan clown – purveyor of jests and jigs – could produce his comic routine from folk materials. See also Hattaway’s chapter, above, pp. 93–130.

of the interludes written by members of Sir Thomas More's circle. John Heywood, the best-known playwright in that group of Catholic humanists, produced a small corpus of dramatic works between 1519 and 1533 which together converted debate into comic theatre.

Of the six interludes and late fragment usually attributed to Heywood, probably *The Four P.P.* contains the most diversified mixture of comic ingredients. Characteristically, disputation governs the other elements in this play, its models antique and medieval. Two debates occupy the Palmer, Pardoner, Pothecary, and Peddler; both arise to establish 'mastery' or the relative superiority of the men. In the first debate, each argues his importance by claiming to offer the most expedient means of salvation. In the much longer second, the Pothecary and Pardoner engage in a lying match, opposing a fabliau against a short tale. But the Palmer, not an official participant in this contest, wins it unintentionally with a twenty-three-line speech where he insists: 'Of all the women that I have seen, / I never saw nor knew in my conscience / Any one woman out of patience' (p. 57).

Richly ironic, these characters contradict themselves in debate: their behaviour fails to accord with their vocations, and mastery has no place in saving human souls. Like the fabliau and tale in the lying match, other forms or genres – flyting, satire, farce – contribute to the irony. Word-play and modulations in the verse enhance these effects, pointing speciousness in the dialogue.

Irony yields to religious faith, however, at the very end of the interlude. After the Palmer gives up his unexpected advantage, the Peddler declares a stalemate. Yet he proceeds to resolve 'the debate wherewith ye began' (p. 61) through a sermon, which first exposes the debate's inconsistencies and finally leaves judgement of the disputants and issues to the church. The text closes with the Palmer's prayer in rhyme royal, possibly addressed to both court and populace, 'Beseeching our Lord to prosper you all / In the faith of his Church Universal' (p. 64). At a time of political and religious uncertainty, *The Four P.P.* thus endorses humanist reform and the ideal church as an agent of social harmony.⁸

Between that time and the early 1550s, meagre theatrical records provide almost no substantive evidence of assembly or the influence of Heywood's dramaturgy. Meanwhile comic structure took shape within the academy: grammar schools and both universities performed the comedies of Plautus and Terence; students at every level analysed the structures of these Latin texts. Finally two original plays amplified the Roman models and

⁸ Bevington discusses the auspices of *The Four P.P.* in *From 'Mankind'*, pp. 38–9; and he analyses the interlude's political implications in *Tudor Drama*, pp. 70–3.

reintroduced the miscellaneousness that would distinguish Renaissance comedy. Their precise dates still undetermined, *Gammer Gurton's Needle* by 'Mr. S., Master of Art' and *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall share first place as English comedies built on Latin frames.

Both plays distribute the tripartite narrative sequence over five acts as Renaissance commentators advised: protasis occupies the first two acts; epistasis the second two; and anastrophe the last. In each case the structure appears sharply outlined, because the unities are observed and every act takes its appointed place in the total format. *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, produced at Christ's College, Cambridge, makes the Terentian format an object of wit; it co-ordinates the plot with a developing scatological motif and with a series of obscene puns drawing upon the original all-male performance. At the same time it renders the debate component absurdly concrete, circling the question of who took a needle with characters who act out their confusion through brawling in literal darkness.⁹ Like the composition of *Ralph Roister Doister*, this well-organized structure contains a variety of forms ranging from proverb and flyting to mock-heroic combat. Similarly the dramatis personae incorporate features from a number of classical and native types.

Ralph Roister Doister shows even greater heterogeneity. Written by a schoolmaster for performance by boys, it directs its wit with a difference. Udall borrows a simple action from the sub-plot of Terence's *Eunuchus*, expanding it with all manner of rhetorical, literary, and popular conventions to mock folly from divers angles. For instance, he fills out the narrative with bits and pieces of other Latin plays such as Terence's *Andria* and *Adelphi*, and probably Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* and *Pseudolus*. In addition he deconstructs an old medieval debate over the ideal lover – soldier or scholar – using the first term as a character and the second as a plot device (i.e., the construing of a mispunctuated letter).

Through a protagonist who combines braggart soldier and wooing knight, Udall burlesques the whole chivalric tradition. With the mispunctuated letter that protests devotion to a lady, he parodies not only conceited ignorance but also a ritual of courtly love. When the lady rejects both missive and protagonist, a battle results which turns chivalric standards upside-down: the knight attacks his mistress's house; he has been armed with a kitchen pail on his head and furnished with other devices linked to the festivities Breughel painted in 'The Battle of Carnival and Lent'. Earlier Roister Doister

⁹ For discussions of the play's artfulness, see R. W. Ingram, 'Gammer Gurton's Needle: comedy not quite of the lowest order?', *SEL* 7 (1967), 257–68; and J. W. Robinson, 'The art and meaning of *Gammer Gurton's Needle*', *RenD* n.s. 14 (1983), 45–77.

had enacted his despair by pretending to die and participating in his own funeral, an accurate imitation of Roman Catholic rites.¹⁰ Setting up each bizarre exposure of the protagonist, the character Matthew Merrygreek – like Diccon in *Gammer Gurton's Needle* – functions as classical parasite, medieval Vice, and Renaissance fool.

Udall's comic repertoire includes Chaucer and popular romance; songs, proverbs, and folk-plays; topical references to the middle class and his own life. From this collage a blatantly ironic portrait emerges, a title-character who misunderstands the abstract code on which he acts and the events which his actions generate. Through Merrygreek's comments Udall invites his audience to enjoy the irony and appreciate its moral implications.

Little evidence of such deliberate comic fusion survives the period from mid-sixteenth century until 1583, although Italian comedies imported for academic and court circles show a degree of hybridization. Among these, George Gascoigne's *Supposes* (Gray's Inn, 1566) translates Ariosto's *I Suppositi* (*The Substitutes*). Classically formulated, Ariosto's skilfully wrought intrigue plot – from Plautus' *Captivi* and Terence's *Eunuchus* – arranges its three-part narrative in five acts. When Gascoigne conflated the original texts in his version, he further refined the continuity of the sequence.

As a result, *Supposes* elegantly portrays a love-relationship obstructed by troublesome fathers. A young man gains secret access to his mistress by changing places with his servant, 'The first suppose and ground of all the supposes' (1.1.111). With three fathers on the scene in the fourth and fifth acts, parents of the lovers and servants, complications intensify until 'a man might make a comedy of it' (5.7.55–6). At last the dénouement reveals true identities, unites the lovers, and reconciles their fathers.

Gascoigne emphasizes the dialectic of this plot in the 1575 edition, where he first defines and then annotates the 'supposes' which propel the action. According to 'The Prologue or Argument,' 'our Suppose is nothing else but a mistaking or imagination of one thing for another' (14–16). The notes identify twenty-five supposes, which grow more and more concentrated with the intricate tangle of the epitasis. In their context, the play becomes an enactment of *dianoia*: 'that ongoing process of reasoning and problem-solving which the commentators suggest is the action of comedy'.¹¹

¹⁰ On the parodic components of *Ralph Roister Doister*, see especially Plumstead, 'Satirical parody in *Roister Doister*'. Michael D. Bristol describes images of carnival and Breughel's painting in a way that throws light on the two comedies (*Carnival and Theatre*, p. 67).

¹¹ See Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, p. 139, n. 16 and pp. 157–61. Shakespeare would make use of both action and dialectic from *Supposes* in the sub-plot of *The Taming of the Shrew*.

Ariosto had set this double-edged intrigue in contemporary Ferrara, where its first performance took place in 1509. If the Italian playwright brought Roman comedy up to date, Gascoigne Anglicized its tone with standard jokes, word-play, and balanced prose anticipating Lyly's. The characters in *Supposes* quibble on hanging, cuckoldry, and related topics:

CLEANDER I perceive you are no very good Bibler, Pasiphilo.

PASIPHILLO Yes, sir, an excellent good bibbler, specially in a bottle.

(1.2.37–40)

Throughout the dialogue, conspicuously rhetorical passages sound euphuistic. So the disguised lover, Erostrato, laments his situation early in the comedy:

But, alas, I find that only love is unsatiable: for, as the fly playeth with the flame till at last she is cause of her own decay, so the lover that thinketh with kissing and colling to content his unbridled appetite, is commonly seen the only cause of his own consumption.

(1.3.81–6)

Appropriation

The annals of English drama between Udall and Lyly disclose little about genres; many titles of lost plays – and the probability of lost titles – frustrate attempts to classify or estimate the number of comedies in different venues. While these uneven records imply that three to four dozen comedies may have appeared at court, the universities, and the Inns of Court, published attacks on the theatre after 1576 indicate the genre's popularity elsewhere. In his pamphlet *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), for example, Stephen Gosson declares: 'I may boldly say it, because I have seen it, that . . . bawdy comedies in Latin, French, Italian, and Spanish, have been thoroughly ransacked to furnish the playhouses in London.'¹² Together this evidence gives the impression of a genre gaining favour with all social classes. By the mid-1580s comedy poised before its giddy ascent in the Elizabethan/Jacobean theatre, where it would finally surpass tragedy by a ratio of three to one.

John Lyly heralds this change in his occasional theory and his practice, exemplifying the kind of paradox which has become the hallmark of his work. Sometimes his prologues acknowledge a new audience of mixed character and taste demanding the extension of generic limits: 'what heretofore hath

¹² Modernized from the quotation in Wilson and Hunter, *The English Drama: 1485–1585*, pp. 118–19.

been served in several dishes for a feast, is now minced in a charger for a gallimaufry' (Prologue to *Midas*, 17–19). More than once Lyly claims politely to exceed the bounds himself: 'If we present a mingle-mangle, our fault is to be excused, because the whole world is become an hodgepodge' (Prologue to *Midas*, 19–20).¹³ Yet his eight plays, written for boys to act at court and in private theatres, clearly belong to the province of comedy distinguished by wit.

Endymion, performed at court on Candlemas night, c. 1587–88, remains Lyly's most elaborate and well-known comedy. Modelling external structure to new effect, the dramatist assembles within it an intricate comic repertoire for his aristocratic audience. Here the Prologue rejects dramatic kinds in favour of unrestrained fancy: 'We present neither comedy, nor tragedy, nor story, nor anything, but that whosoever heareth may say this: Why, here is a tale of the Man in the Moon' (9–11). But the text which follows brilliantly reworks the neo-classical sequence to emphasize contradictions in theme, character, and reality at large. Although exposition follows the rules and occupies the first two acts, it presents Endymion's love-conflict in oblique allegorical terms which the audience must decipher. Moreover, the protagonist does not enact the complications which ensue in Acts 3 and 4: he sleeps while other characters deal with the consequences. During the fifth act dénouement, a restored Endymion stands alone and silent for more than eighty lines among a group of odd couples.

Lyly has forced a gap between the inherent logic of comic format and the events of his play. As the dramatic narrative advances the gap widens, because the main action is reflected in a number of other plots and episodes. Endymion's unrequited love for Cynthia appears in four other versions, including a burlesque: Eumenides' for Semele; Corsites' for Tellus; Tellus' for Endymion; and Sir Tophas', 'a foolish braggart's', for Dipsas, 'an old enchantress' (*Dramatis Personae*, p. 19). Under the stress of passion, both Corsites and Sir Tophas fall asleep; Sir Tophas' dream corresponds with Endymion's.¹⁴

Complicating his art-form through dissonance, multiplication, and symmetry, Lyly makes it represent a basic paradox of human experience: the coexistence of order with arbitrariness, reason with illogic. It also represents more specifically the contradictions of court life and values. A court

¹³ Robert Weimann studied the implications of these lines from the Prologue to *Midas* in 'History and the issue of authority in representation: the Elizabethan theater and the Reformation', *NLH* 17 (1986), 449–76.

¹⁴ On Lyly's 'analogous action' and its use in later plays, see A. R. Braunmuller's chapter, above, pp. 53–92.

entertainment, *Endymion* was presented before Queen Elizabeth on a religious feast-day which celebrated aspiration to purity and wisdom. In three distinct phases of debate which accompany the three phases of action, this theatrical piece argues coterie issues in what was originally a spiritual context: 'What kind of relationship must the Courtier have with his sovereign? Should love or friendship bear the greater sway in determining men's actions? What constitutes royal justice?'¹⁵ Like the narrative, this debate ends on a note of ambivalence.

In order to build his frame, Lyly used three accounts of the *Endymion* myth: the handsome shepherd loved by the moon (related by poets and fabulists); the sleeper (analysed by philosophers); and the astronomer rumoured to love the moon (described by Pliny). He consulted Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and *Heroides*, Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, Castiglione's *Courtier*, and Marc Antonio Epicuro's *Mirzia* (an Italian pastoral drama published in 1582). Among its furnishings, this complicated structure displays elements from many other literary and dramatic kinds: romance in Eumenides' adventures and Dipsas' evil enchantment; psychomachia, or allegorized conflict of the soul, in Eumenides' encounter with Geron at the fountain; masque in its spectacle, music, and complimentary vision of Queen Elizabeth; Petrarchan sonnets throughout the lovers' speeches. Moreover, four types of allegory – physical, court, Neoplatonic, and Christian – permeate the whole work. For Sir Tophas alone Lyly borrowed Chaucer's knight from *The Canterbury Tales*, the *miles gloriosus* from Latin comedy, the *capitano millantatore* and *pedante* of Renaissance Italian comic drama.¹⁶

Patterns of correspondence and antithesis link characters, scenes, and ideas; and these devices allow Lyly's prose – in fiction as well as drama – to analyse complex subjects clearly and logically.¹⁷ In *Endymion* a key matter for debate is the experience of love, and dialogue breaks it down most strikingly by echoing the hero's discourse in the key of burlesque. This strategy begins with the first two acts, when Endymion expresses his feelings at length in a highly wrought style. Through one soliloquy, for instance, he projects the self-image of Petrarchan lover with traditional conceits and rhetoric:

¹⁵ Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, p. 216.

¹⁶ For helpful studies about the background and meaning of *Endymion*, see Hunter, *John Lyly*, pp. 184–94; Saccio, *The Court Comedies of John Lyly*, pp. 169–86; Susan D. Thomas, 'Endymion and its sources', *CL* 30 (1978), 35–52; and Noemi Messori, 'Parallels between Italian and English courtly plays in the sixteenth century: Carlo Turco and John Lyly' in J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, eds., *Theatre of the English and Italian Renaissance* (Houndmills and London, 1991), pp. 141–60.

¹⁷ A seminal analysis of Lyly's technique is Barish's article, 'The prose style of John Lyly'.

Sweet Cynthia, how wouldst thou be pleased, how possessed? . . . Desirest thou the passions of love, the sad and melancholy moods of perplexed minds, the not-to-be expressed torments of racked thoughts? Behold my sad tears, my deep sighs, my hollow eyes, my broken sleeps, my heavy countenance.

(2.1.4–12)

A few moments later the pages anatomize these symptoms, reducing them through literalism and word-play:

DARES Come, Samias, diddest thou ever hear such a sighing . . . for moonshine in the water? . . . How say you, Favilla, is not love a lurcher, that taketh men's stomachs away that they cannot eat, their spleen that they cannot laugh, their hearts that they cannot fight, their eyes that they cannot sleep, and leaveth nothing but livers to make nothing but lovers?

(2.2.1–13)

Verbally deflated at once, Endymion's aspiring love both sounds and looks farcical later in Sir Tophas' rendition:

love hath, as it were, milked my thoughts and drained from my heart the very substance of my accustomed courage; it worketh in my head like new wine, so as I must hoop my sconce with iron, lest my head break, and so I bewray my brains. But I pray thee, first discover me in all parts, that I may be like a lover, and then will I sigh and die. Take my gun and give me a gown: *Cedant arma togae.*

(3.3.23–9)

As the echoes make an abstract concept progressively more concrete, they expose its potential absurdity. At the same time they direct that absurdity away from the central character, leaving him with most of his dignity intact.

Innovations like these in style, content, and form mark Lyly's influence on dramatic comedy until the end of the English Renaissance. With other plays in the comic mode – Peele's *Arraignement of Paris*, Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, the anonymous *Fair Em* – his theatrical work established love between the sexes as a theme for the stage. When Shakespeare explored the subject during the 1590s in comedies from *Love's Labour's Lost* to *Twelfth Night*, he made Lyly's techniques part of his comic repertoire. Jacobean playwrights would examine romantic love with blunter instruments.

Meantime comedy engaged in other experiments. Between 1590 and 1604, for instance, a small group of plays adopted whole plots from Plautus and Terence. They include Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* (c. 1590–3) and Chapman's *All Fools* (c. 1599–1601), comedies which manipulate their originals to heighten romance and satire.

Apparently *The Comedy of Errors* was performed first at Gray's Inn and ten years later at court, both times as part of Christmas festivities. The dramatist's awareness of audience and occasion may have inspired his sophisticated assembly of classical sources. Like some late-Renaissance Italian comedies, Shakespeare's early work practises multiple *contaminatio*: it merges two plots (a method advocated by Terence in *Andria*), complicating them and still maintaining the unities.¹⁸ The young playwright drew his intrigue from Plautus' *Menaechmi*, a text well under twelve hundred lines. Filling it out for Elizabethan performance, he elaborated the Roman plot and characters. Plautus based his action on the mistaken identities of a pair of twins, one accompanied by an unnamed wife; Shakespeare doubles the twins by adding a pair of identical servants, makes the wife prominent in the action, and gives her an unmarried sister as confidante. Moreover Shakespeare's version incorporates material from Plautus' *Amphitruo* for Act 3, scene 1, the pivotal scene where the wife, Adriana, feasts the twin she mistakes for her husband.

By doubling the twins, Shakespeare adds not only symmetry but scope for confusion. Plautus depended on errors of cognition or identity to advance his plot; Shakespeare introduces numerous errors of association – wrongly attributed actions to rightly identified characters – with the set of twin Dromios.¹⁹ The servants also contribute an element of burlesque, re-enacting their masters' bewilderment at a farcical level and commenting on the play's serious issues in parodic terms. Since *The Comedy of Errors* represents identity as both appearance and selfhood, it raises many questions about the ways individuals define themselves through social bonds. The entire play discourses on this theme as characters struggle with bizarre situations.²⁰ At points the questions actually become subjects for debate: Adriana and her sister, Luciana, argue the appropriate roles of husband and wife in marriage (2.1); Antipholus of Ephesus and Balthasar, a merchant, different aspects of hospitality (3.1); Antipholus of Syracuse and Dromio of Syracuse, the importance of timeliness in social behaviour (2.2). When the latter match ends, Antipholus of Syracuse indicates that Dromio's

¹⁸ On the influence of audience and occasion, see Catherine M. Shaw, 'The conscious art of *The Comedy of Errors*' in Maurice Charney, ed., *Shakespearean Comedy* (New York, 1980), pp. 17–28; on this Italian connection and the technique, see Louise George Clubb, 'Shakespeare's comedy and late cinquecento mixed genres' in Charney, ed., *Shakespearean Comedy*, pp. 129–39.

¹⁹ Timothy Long differentiates these two kinds of errors in 'The calculus of confusion: cognitive and associative errors in Plautus's *Menaechmi* and Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*', *Classical Bulletin* 53 (1976), 20–3.

²⁰ See R. A. Foakes's Introduction to his Arden edition, pp. xliii–xlix; Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love* (London, 1974), chapter 1; and Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, pp. 165–74.

argument mocks the whole process of disputation: 'You would all this time have proved, there is no time for all things' (99–100).

As Shakespeare adapted Plautus' comic drama, he intensified its romance as well as its intrigue. In Latin comedy the long separations, adventures, and reunions of families had come ultimately from Hellenic romance. Elizabethan audiences were familiar with such events from countless Greek, medieval, and Renaissance romances and their offshoots. Exploiting romance's sentiment and fortuitousness, Shakespeare framed the separation–adventure–reunion sequence from Plautus with the story of Egeon and Emilia. The tribulations of this couple probably come from John Gower's narrative about Apollonius of Tyre in the *Confessio Amantis*. While this action resolves the plot's discords through the agency of Emilia as Abbess, it also demonstrates an alternative set of social values. An idealized marriage contrasts the materialistic views central to the main plot; moral and ethical concerns displace legalistic and commercial preoccupations; and a gossips' feast transforms the chaos of Adriana's banquet to harmony.

Analysing the total comedy, Harold Brooks concludes that about 750 of its approximately 1,750 lines promote the intrigue; about 300 serve comic rhetoric; the remainder develop romance features. *The Comedy of Errors* thus contains the genre of romance within that of comedy, the whole organized by wit, informed by irony, and tailored to meet theatrical expectations. Different types of verse counterpointed with prose simultaneously emphasize the characters' failure to communicate with one another and distinguish various strata of the intrigue. Yet audiences rarely see the 'Shakespearean palimpsest' which results, because production since the eighteenth century has tended to stress broad humour at the expense of subtler qualities.²¹

George Chapman's *All Fools* suffers from neglect rather than high spirits, a fate it shares with his seven other comedies. During the late-Elizabethan age, however, it seems to have enjoyed success in three kinds of theatrical settings: the Rose, the Blackfriars, and court. Evidently the polish of its form attracted spectators with different backgrounds and tastes. A result of *contaminatio*, the highly finished dramatic narrative meshes three short plays by Terence. The main intrigue and a variety of situations come from the *Heautontimoroumenos*, along with a basic premise: a deceiver can use truth as a means to his end. From *Adelphi* Chapman selected character traits for his principal figures, and from *Eunuchus* he took a few incidents and passages. Primarily he owes Terence the traditional comic paradigm

²¹ Harold Brooks, 'Themes and structure in *The Comedy of Errors*' in John Russell Brown and Bernard Harris, eds., *Early Shakespeare*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies 3 (1961), p. 69. Shaw, 'The conscious art', p. 26, describes the play as 'a Shakespearean palimpsest'.

of father and son in conflict over love, a model which appears twice in *Heautontimoroumenos*.

While the central plot edges forward in a series of convoluted intrigues, Chapman's invented sub-plot follows a slightly less intricate course and broadens the play's satire. In the principal action deceptions converge on the covetous Sir Gostanzo, a 'rustic machiavel', through the machinations of Rinaldo, a 'university wit'.²² Gostanzo's rakish son, Valerio, has married against the old man's wishes, and through Rinaldo contrives to keep both his bride and his inheritance. Meanwhile Rinaldo's brother, Fortunio, pursues Gostanzo's daughter with similar objectives and devices. As Rinaldo manipulates Gostanzo into absurd schemes for which the victim takes credit, Gostanzo eagerly participates in his own gulling. With the secondary action this process goes into reverse and emphasizes the ubiquity of fools. Rinaldo arranges stratagems to trick Cornelio, a jealous humour-figure obsessed with fear of cuckoldry. Just as his plans culminate and both plots meet in the fifth act, Cornelio outwits Rinaldo in front of all the other characters. Each of the major ruses (in 4.1 and 5.2) turns on the revelation of truth.

Earning its title from the holiday, *All Fools* exposes folly at large in a society growing commercial, opportunistic, and self-centred. It makes its point not only through complex plotting but also through debate, set speeches, and occasional parodies. In both verse and prose it regularly criticizes women (1.1, 3.1, 5.2). Some passages mock literary styles, imitations of Lyly (3.1.195–9), and the vogue for 'comical satire' (2.1.336–49, 5.2.46–7). Just before the dénouement, corresponding soliloquies by Rinaldo and Cornelio sum up the follies which constitute the play. Emblematically the scene itself occurs in a tavern, a place of revelry where (as Valerio says) 'there are no degrees / Of order' (5.2.61–2). At its conclusion, Valerio caps the play's running mock-argument – the characters' rationalizations for their mad behaviour – with the ultimate irrationality: a panegyric on 'this present age, which we term the horned age' (227–8). Chapman's Prologue and Epilogue make the cuckolded age include the audience. Finally, that is, he presents Terence from a Horatian point of view.²³

Chapman exemplifies not only the handful of dramatists who imitated Plautus and Terence, but also the larger group who offered the gallimaufry that Lyly had defended. Over several decades bridging the two centuries, many writers produced eclectic comedies from various literary and

²² Altman's epithets, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, p. 175.

²³ On the satire in *All Fools*, see Frank Manley's Introduction to his Regents Renaissance Drama edition (Lincoln, Nebr., 1968) and David C. McPherson, 'Chapman's adaptations of New Comedy', *EM* 19 (1968), 51–64.

non-literary conventions. Creating their own models, they built the tripartite frame out of divers materials.

Chapman's *Gentleman Usher* illustrates this type of comedy, in this instance exploiting the resources and catering to the audience at the Blackfriars. Its main action stems from the rivalry between Duke Alphonso and Prince Vincentio, his son, over the lovely young Margaret. Although its source is unknown, this plot has familiar antecedents in classical and Renaissance drama. The sub-plot relates the story of Strozza, Vincentio's loyal friend, whose adventures lead him through an epiphany. Giving the play its philosophic implications, this narrative comes from a medical treatise that shades into Christian platonism.²⁴ As the plots unfold side by side, Chapman dramatizes a platonic hierarchy of love with Alphonso's unnatural desire at the bottom and Strozza's heavenly vision at the top. Often the action pauses for rituals that comment symbolically on this theme. Devised for a children's company to perform, *The Gentleman Usher* embellishes both action and rituals with music, dance, and visual displays. The pattern of exposition, complication, anastrophe barely contains these elaborate components.

Within that pattern an unusual design takes form. A series of shows, or stylized performances within the play, begins in the opening scene. After a brief but formal reading of terrible poetry and the ridiculous enactment of three lines from Plautus' *Curculio*, numerous characters prepare to rehearse a pageant. The pageant with its music and spectacle occupies the second scene, enacting Alphonso's amorous suit to Margaret. When this scene ends, another readies the stage for the show that fills Act 2, scene 2. Now the performers deliver Alphonso's message in rough but explicit verse: 'Thus Lady and Duchess we conclude, / Fair virgins must not be too rude: /.../ Yet take you in your ivory clutches / This noble Duke, and be his Duchess' (2.2.112-17).

Both longer shows misrepresent rituals: the first distorts features from medieval spring fertility games; the second, May-game tradition.²⁵ With other elements of mimesis in the first two acts, they invite the audience to recognize and interpret allegorical representations later in the comedy. As a result the third-act gulling of Bassiolo, the foolish gentleman usher, shows its connections with misrule or topsy-turvydom. In the fourth and fifth acts, rituals attending the marriage of Vincentio and Margaret, the visionary experience of Strozza, and the curing of Margaret's deformity all carry symbolic

²⁴ For an account of this source, see John Hazel Smith's Regents Renaissance Drama edition of *The Gentleman Usher* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1970), Introduction, pp. xvii-xx and appendix A.

²⁵ See Henry M. Weidner, 'The dramatic uses of Homeric idealism: the significance of theme and design in Chapman's *The Gentleman Usher*', *ELH* 28 (1961), 121-36.

weight. These ceremonies emphasize miraculous recovery and renewal in the pattern of events, implying that the harmony restored at last to Alphonso's court emanates from a higher order. Like Lyly, Chapman has led his audience to decipher a complex allegorical narrative.

Obviously *The Gentleman Usher* gives ample space to other genres and modes within its comic structure. Folk-drama coexists with masque, allegory with medical tract. For details of characterization Chapman borrowed from classical, Italian, and English Renaissance comedy (including his own). Like significant episodes in the sub-plot and the heroine's marvellous restoration, some of the dramatis personae originate in romance. Towards the end dangers and injuries threaten the comic form, straining it with the contradictions of tragicomedy. Finally the play settles into its genre, its eclecticism conveying the contraries of Chapman's own nature: idealist/cynic, classicist/romantic, conformist/iconoclast.²⁶

Not all comic medleys are so serious or complicated. Between 1595 and 1605, for example, about half a dozen plays set lively intrigues in the English countryside. Like *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, these 'nocturnal' comedies grow more and more perplexed in literal darkness. Their broad ironies result from violations of middle-class domestic or community norms, and from their assembling of popular elements within the comic structure.

Among these plays, Henry Porter's *Two Angry Women of Abington* (Admiral's Men, c. 1598) won public success and commissions for two sequels. The intrigue seems an original variation on the classical formula: obstreperous mothers interfere with the courtship of their children. But the play begins with the community rather than the lovers. Centring on a visit between neighbours, the exposition shows how the women's anger disrupts what had been two perfectly balanced family groups: Master Goursey and his wife; Master Barnes and his wife; their sons Frank Goursey and Phillip Barnes; their servants Dick Coomes and Nicholas Proverbs. In order to restore peace, Master Barnes plans the marriage of his daughter, Mall, to Frank, inadvertently launching the complications. Half-way through the action the lovers agree to marry, and the rest of the plot develops from the machinations to unite them by deceiving their mothers. At the turning-point characters start to enter the wood, which becomes increasingly dark as a metaphor of their confusion. Finally the sun rises on the anastrophe, a scene of betrothal and reconciliation. Porter has observed the unity of time, sometimes neglecting consistencies of place and action.

²⁶ Kreider surveys the background of Chapman's characters in *Elizabethan Comic Character Conventions*, and Samuel Schoenbaum defines the contraries in 'The Widow's Tears and the other Chapman', *HLQ* 23 (1960), 338.

Throughout the play characters argue the meaning of authority and the value of social ties, defining key issues through comic intrigue. Meanwhile the two family servants reflect the absurdity of events in their behaviour, idiosyncrasies which Porter devised from popular tradition and drama. Coomes represents a theatrical fashion, the one-dimensional or humour-figure whose readiness to quarrel motivates everything he says and does. A more novel creation, Proverbs can express himself only through maxims – ninety-eight of the approximately 150 in the play – which generally come from oral tradition. His speeches parody the remaining aphorisms in the text which sum up a moral code, and at the same time they burlesque the widespread use of proverbs in contemporary literature and drama. In similar ways Porter gently deflates other literary conventions: romance with the realism of local places and customs, satire with the boisterousness of farce. His prose and blank verse, imitating the accents of ordinary discourse, check any potential lyricism.

Another nocturnal comedy written shortly after Porter's, the anonymous *Merry Devil of Edmonton* also pleased a large audience. According to its 1608 title-page, 'it hath been sundry times acted, by his Majesty's Servants, at the Globe'; Jonson called it 'Your dear delight, "The Devil of Edmonton"' in the Prologue to *The Devil is an Ass* (1616); and it went through five reprintings in the first half of the seventeenth century. On the whole it too derives from popular tradition, literature, and theatre.

The dramatist created part of the intrigue for his main action from a chapter in the prose pamphlet *The Famous History of Friar Bacon* (first extant edition 1627, but apparently known to Greene c. 1590); his title, Induction, and some details come from the legend of magician Peter Fabel; and the account of harrowing spirits in 4.2 originates in a jest. At the heart of the intrigue he invented the tale of Millicent Clare and Raymond Mounchensey, two young lovers thwarted by her parents for his lack of substantial revenues. Despite its variety, this hodgepodge of materials assumes the familiar comic form. The play immediately establishes the conflict between generations, and Fabel begins to direct the lovers' action by the third scene. Meantime a subplot takes shape among four citizens who plan 'to steal some of the king's deer' (2.1.53). Of course one breach of propriety calls attention to the other since covetousness plays a role in both actions. Yet high jinks set the tone as the two plots unwind together, becoming intertwined during the night and finally resolved by morning. Like Porter, the anonymous playwright observes the unity of time.

Set c. 1500 in the countryside north of London – Enfield, Waltham, Cheston – *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* incorporates stories connected with its locales and families. But this nocturnal makes romance elements

noticeable with a prologue and induction that feature magic or sleights. In a burlesque of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Act 5, Fabel outwits the spirit Coreb and gains seven more years of life. As he embarks on this span, he steps into the action proper to manipulate events through disguises and tricks. At several points he and other characters anticipate or review events not only for one another but for the audience. Their workaday blank verse ensures clarity and, with the prose of the sub-plot, voices the play's argument: 'tis in vain to cross the providence' (5.1.260), or to disregard those values that order and enrich social life.²⁷ Although its diction frequently echoes contemporary drama, Shakespeare's in particular, *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* parodies theatrical and literary styles less often than *The Two Angry Women of Abington*.

Within a decade or so of *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, 'his Majesty's Servants' began to act at the Blackfriars theatre (c. 1609/1610). John Fletcher helped to provide them with comedy polished for a sophisticated audience; he developed a comic eclecticism so refined that it gives the impression of homogeneity. At times he reduces a number of sources to fragments for building new plots; or he converts different models into recognizably parodic versions of themselves. Always he elaborates the comic narrative through other genres and modes. However diverse these materials, he consolidates them by means of a comic structure which subsumes the generic repertoire into an elegant symmetry.

The Wild Goose Chase was performed by the King's Men at court in the Christmas season 1621/22 and probably in public some time earlier. Illustrating Fletcher's mature style, it delighted not only the Jacobean audience but Fletcher himself, as two actors from the original production testify in their Dedication to the published script: 'The play was of so general a received acceptance, that (he himself a spectator) we have known him . . . , he as well as the thronged theatre (in despite of his innate modesty), applauding this rare issue of his brain' (p. 242). The rareness of the issue is its form.

Fletcher invented two intrigues for this comedy, both involving sexual pursuits. In the main chase Oriana tries to capture her betrothed Mirabel, 'the wild goose, a travelled *monsieur* and great defier of all ladies in the way of marriage, otherwise their much loose servant' (p. 249). In the sub-plot Belleur and Pinac, Mirabel's travelling companions, attempt to woo Rosalura and Lillia-Bianca, beautiful sisters. Both actions, set in Paris, generate stratagems primarily to trap Mirabel and test his friends' sincerity and perception.

²⁷ Bristol, *Carnival and Theatre*, pp. 167–72, discusses the play's treatment of authority in relation to social values.

After the exposition has sorted out the three couples, each intrigue evolves as a series of performances within the play. The secondary plot establishes the pattern in Act 2, scene 2, when Lillia-Bianca – ordinarily a serious student – dances and entertains Pinac until she has worn him out. Once Lillia-Bianca has baffled her suitor, in Act 2, scene 3 Rosalura – ordinarily sociable and plain-spoken – delivers a satiric attack on men who travel which dumbfounds Belleur. Mirabel encourages both companions to retaliate for his own sport: ‘Wooing and wiving, hang it: give me mirth, / Witty and dainty mirth’ (3.1.312–13); and immediately he becomes unwitting spectator to the first of Oriana’s shows. For this relatively simple playlet her brother, De Gard, pretends to be a noble suitor threatening offenders of her reputation. Mirabel regrets the loss of Oriana in a speech quickly interrupted by a servant who reveals the trick.

None of these scenarios ends decisively; each results in confusion and disappointment for the players or their audience. During the fourth act three more inconclusive shows counterpoint one another until the finale, which occupies most of the fifth act and involves all of the major characters. Oriana plays the part of a wealthy Italian lady bequeathed by her brother to Mirabel, who is caught this time with the lure of a fortune. As this ruse reaches its climax the other couples agree to marry, and Fletcher completes his portrayal of courtship as an intricate network of love and deceit. From the start his participants in the chase have discussed and enacted this paradoxical view. The symmetry of their pursuits implies a certain grace and continuity in the process of wooing, but constant play-acting qualifies the compliment. The characters’ changing faces, their anticlimactic performances, and the persistent sense of opposition suggest the unpredictability of individual hearts and therefore of sexual relationships. Appropriately the closing lines, spoken by the men, express these contradictions – social and psychological – in a promise of union and a *double entendre*:

MIRABEL

This wild goose chase is done, we have won o’ both sides.
Brother, your love, and now to church of all hands –
Let’s lose no time.

PINAC

Our travelling, lay by.

BELLEUR

No more for Italy; for the Low Countries, I. (5.6.105–8)

With characteristic variety Fletcher incorporates other generic elements in this comedy. Performances within the play borrow from ritual, mumming,

disguising, masque, and tragicomedy. Through Oriana's name and situation the dramatist adds features of chivalric romance which the context inverts ironically; and he may also refer to an Italian intrigue comedy (Giambattista Della Porta's *Il moro* [1607]), the cult of Oriana/Queen Elizabeth, and earlier Beaumont and Fletcher plays. Characters defend their (im)moral postures with rhetorical devices and satiric thrust. Yet this diversity went unremarked by Fletcher's admirers, whereas his 'comic geometry', accomplished with wit and flexible blank verse, impressed his audience and lasted as a model into the Restoration.²⁸

Rule a Wife and Have a Wife, licensed and performed at court late in 1624, also remained popular for similar reasons. In its composition Fletcher seems to have fused two Spanish novels: Cervantes' *El Casamiento engañoso* became the sub-plot, and probably Salas Barbadillo's *El sagaz Estacio* served the main one. The principal action, in which a husband subdues his intemperate wife, shows as well the influence of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* (which Fletcher had reworked c. 1610 in *The Woman's Prize*, another comedy).

Hastening through two courtships to two marriages, *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* focuses on deceptions between wedded couples. In both relationships each partner intends to exploit the other for material gain or, in one case, means to conceal sexual indulgence. In each situation one partner assumes mastery through superior wit. Two sequences of intrigues result from the contests, which counterpoint each other like the actions in *The Wild Goose Chase*. Again Fletcher transforms deceit to art, but he synchronizes the coincidences of plot even more precisely in the later work.

This comedy balances a gentleman husband who outwits his heiress wife against a maidservant wife who outwits her soldier husband. Once it has established the character notes of the heiress, Donna Margarita, and the copper captain, Michael Perez, these two victims discover the real natures of their spouses – a full act later than the audience – in corresponding scenes (3.4 and 3.5). When the play ends, they will surrender consecutively (5.3 and 5.4). As Richard Levin points out, another equation connects the victors, Leon and Estifania: 'they both succeed in duping their prospective mates by misrepresenting themselves, outface them when the deception is revealed, force them to surrender, and then relent somewhat for a harmonious resolution'.²⁹ In *The Wild Goose Chase* Fletcher's

²⁸ Rota Herzberg Lister gives the fullest discussion of this comedy's background in the Introduction to her critical edition of *The Wild Goose Chase* (1980); Cyrus Hoy coins the phrase 'comic geometry' as he considers the play in 'Fletcherian romantic comedy', *RORD* 27 (1984), 9.

²⁹ *The Multiple Plot*, p. 52.

calculations supported his working hypothesis about the paradoxes of courtship; here they corroborate a proposition about the contrarities of marriage.

Moreover a third and farcical action parallels the other two plots in *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*, emphasizing that dupes outnumber wits in the domain of this play. Episodes involving Cacafo, a foolish usurer, heighten the folly and mercenary interests which inform the rest of the action. As a result satire enters this comedy, sustained in passages on lawyers and governors specifically, humours and women in general. But satire does not exclude other genres or forms; comedy admits masque, declamation, even the fleeting moment of romance. With supple blank verse and typical éclat, Fletcher again creates the effect of unity from miscellaneousness.

Urban designs

Porter's eclectic *Two Angry Women of Abington* belongs to a group of plays which Alexander Leggatt defines as 'citizen comedy' in his book on this facet of English Renaissance drama. From the 1590s until c. 1610 these comedies about the middle class dealt with contemporary social issues in contemporary social milieu: 'the action is often stylized, but the settings are prosaic and familiar – streets, shops, private houses'.³⁰ Sparse during the first decade, citizen comedy proliferated during the second in the form Brian Gibbons describes as 'Jacobean city comedy'. Gibbons distinguishes plays of this type 'by their critical and satiric design, their urban settings, their exclusion of material appropriate to romance, fairy-tale, sentimental legend or patriotic chronicle'.³¹

In effect a new comic style emerged at the turn of the century, satirizing urban life by sharply focusing its preoccupations with finance, power, and (inevitably) sex. Topical discourse became a notable part of the generic repertoire, and the genre became part of the Jacobean dialogue about disturbing cultural changes. As it took shape, city comedy attracted some outstanding playwrights: Ben Jonson, John Marston, Thomas Middleton. Once established between 1604 and 1607, it generated many 'hurried imitations and adaptations' which testify to its popular success.³² During its prime it appeared in public and private theatres, and at court.

Jonson not only shaped city comedy in its initial phase but continued to experiment with it throughout his career. At the start, *Every Man in*

³⁰ *Citizen Comedy*, p. 4. ³¹ Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, p. 11.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 102. For other discussions of city comedy, see Leinwand, *The City Staged*, and Paster, *The Idea of the City*, chapters 6 and 7.

his Humour helped to establish the form and launched his profession as dramatist. Though he had already written other plays, Jonson considered this comedy his début: it stands at the head of his folio or collected *Workes*, and in its dedication there he calls it ‘of the fruits, the first’ (11). He revised this early play between its first printing in quarto (1601) and its second in folio (1616), the two versions indicating how his view of city comedy matured along with his art. Modifications add coherence to the plot, characters, and argument of *Every Man in his Humour*. Most important, the experienced dramatist relocates the play in London.

Originally performed by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (with Shakespeare, Burbage, and Kemp in the cast), *Every Man in his Humour* premiered successfully in 1598, became part of the company’s repertory, and played at court in 1605. But Jonson did not cater to popular tastes at the Curtain or Globe; instead he presented a new type of comedy assembled from existing generic materials. It seems that he composed this play from a number of models rather than particular sources: Latin comedy, satire, moral interludes, and the idiosyncratic or ‘humour’ characters in Chapman’s *An Humorous Day’s Mirth* (1597). He combined elements from each in a format which both reflects and departs from the classical precepts he espoused. In his Prologue to the folio edition, a famous passage states the essential components and purpose of this new comedy:

deeds, and language, such as men do use:
And persons, such as Comedy would choose,
When she would show an image of the times,
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.
(21–4)

Distinguishing the subject of city comedy from Gascoigne’s supposes and Shakespeare’s errors, the next lines identify follies specifically as ‘Our popular errors’ (26).

Both versions of *Every Man in his Humour* use Latin comedy as a frame, borrowing the familiar narrative sequence of father-son conflict mediated by a subordinate. Yet this situation immediately connects with several others – the gulling of assorted relatives and acquaintances, the tribulations of a water-bearer, the irrational acts of a jealous merchant – in a convoluted plot that makes up with invention what it lacks in credibility. As a modern critic demonstrates (with the folio edition), the playwright links different groups of characters through coincidence: ‘The country gull Stephen is the cousin of Young Knowell, who happens to be the close friend of Wellbred, who for his amusement is “humouring” two city gulls, one of whom, Matthew, is

courting Bridget, who happens to be the sister of Kitley, who is married by chance to the sister of Wellbred...'³³

Nevertheless, Jonson maintains order with a number of devices: tripartite comic structure, unity of time, economical staging, symmetrical arrangements of characters, and recurrent situations. In the folio play, the narrow strip of London and its northern suburbs which contains the action also enhances the impression of control. Finally, an argument structures each version. Capped oratorically by the son, an explicit defence of poetry occurs in the early version. Later the defence becomes implicit, its encomium replaced by the Prologue and its dialectic absorbed into the perfect balance of the medium.³⁴

T. S. Eliot perceived this harmony in Jonson's canon as 'poetry of the surface', and he found it in characterization as well as verse: 'Whereas in Shakespeare the effect is due to the way in which the characters *act upon* one another, in Jonson it is given by the way in which the characters *fit in* with each other'.³⁵ According to this distinction, Jonson's characters are 'constituents' of his dramatic scene. In Eliot's sense they 'fit in with each other', no matter how they do or do not interact. *Every Man in his Humour* frequently illustrates the general point, whether dramatis personae clash (sometimes violently) or indulge their eccentricities alone.

In the late sixteenth century such eccentricities became known as humours, a term defined by Jonson's next play:

when some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluxions, all to run one way;
This may be truly said to be a humour.
(Every Man out of his Humour,
Induction, 105-9)

Not all of the characters in *Every Man in his Humour* appear so totally overcome; however, most become engrossed in fantasies of themselves – as

³³ Ralph Alan Cohen, 'The importance of setting in the revision of *Every Man in his Humour*', *ELR* 8 (1978), 192-3.

³⁴ Daniel C. Boughner analyses the tripartite structure in *The Devil's Disciple: Ben Jonson's Debt to Machiavelli* (New York, 1968), chapter 9. I am grateful to William Blissett for permitting me to see in typescript his essay 'The concinnity of *Every Man in his Humour*', where he examines the play's symmetry and points out the change between the two defences.

³⁵ 'Ben Jonson', from *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, reprinted in Jonas A. Barish, ed., *Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), pp. 14, 18.

cavalier or poet or cuckold – which divide them from the others in solipsistic isolation. Moreover, each behaves as if he (or she) belongs in another genre – love-lyric, romantic tragedy, prodigal-son fable, cuckolding farce – enacting burlesques of those forms within the sphere of city comedy.³⁶

By means of revision Jonson fully realized each ‘syndrome of folly’ and its parody with matching linguistic distortions.³⁷ As a result the final version heightens irony of the whole: characters live by illusions of self-importance or centrality while coexisting in a system of other deluded spirits: ‘For Jonson is not writing about common agreement on the outside world at all. He is writing about diverse and unmergeable inner worlds, about the impossibility of common agreement, about the psychological artificiality of a commonly defined outer world, even when it is a moral necessity’.³⁸

Between versions of *Every Man in his Humour*, Jonson wrote *The Alchemist*, among various other comedies. In 1610 the King’s Men gave this comic masterpiece the first of its successful seventeenth-century performances. Using a method that had by then become his practice, Jonson assembled *The Alchemist* from models rather than sources. The frame derives from Latin comedy and farce, Plautus’ *Mostellaria* and the Italian *Candelaio*, as well as late morality plays; it struck Coleridge as one of ‘the three most perfect plots ever planned’.³⁹ Within the frame constant and various references – from classical works and alchemical literature to current events and Jonson’s own dramas – add to the play’s wealth of details, a source of its intensity.

If the sub-plots of *Every Man in his Humour* seem to miss a link now and then, those in *The Alchemist* never fail to connect. The later work also begins with its framing action: the multifaceted ‘venture tripartite’ (1.1.135) by means of which three rogues – Subtle, Face, and Dol Common – cheat divers gulls out of their goods and money. In this comedy, however, the frame totally contains the sub-plots. Once Jonson has set it up, he introduces the victims individually: Dapper the clerk, Druggier the tobacconist, Sir Epicure Mammon, Ananias the Anabaptist. The intrigues centring on these characters become entwined with one another and new complications. Druggier introduces Dame Pliant and her brother, Kastril, to the action; Surly, the

³⁶ Robert N. Watson, *Ben Jonson’s Parodic Strategy: Literary Imperialism in the Comedies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), examines *Every Man in his Humour* as ‘a system of integrated parodies’ (p. 19), chapter 1.

³⁷ Barish measures Jonson’s linguistic achievement in *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 98–104.

³⁸ See Gabriele Bernhard Jackson, ed., *Every Man in his Humour* (Yale edition, 1969), p. 20.

³⁹ *Table Talk* (1835), quoted in R. V. Holdsworth, ‘*Every Man in his Humour*’ and ‘*The Alchemist*’: A Casebook (London, 1978), pp. 148–9. Coleridge ranks *The Alchemist* with *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Tom Jones*.

gamester who arrived with Sir Epicure, makes a fool of himself in pursuit of Dame Pliant; and finally the returning Lovewit, master of the house, participates in a device to resolve the confusion.

This perfect plot moves forward with perfect clarity, regulated by Jonson so that its tempo increases steadily along with its involution. As R. V. Holdsworth points out, the characters appear in larger and larger groups: five in the first act, seven in the second, eight in the third, nine in the fourth, and twenty-one (including neighbours, officers, and parson) in the finale. Similarly phased, the intrigues not only accumulate but grow progressively more convoluted.⁴⁰

Meantime the rogues need to keep most of their gulls from encountering one another. When the action begins, each knock on the door occasions disposing of one victim in preparation for the arrival of the next; and it leads to costume changes by the three partners. As the number of gulls and their visits multiply, separating them becomes more and more difficult. Separation results in surprises, reversals, the ultimate farce rushing at high speed through interruption and counterpointed episodes, reaching maximum velocity in the fourth act.⁴¹

The achievement of this form calls attention to the playwright's skill: 'one has the sense of watching a juggler add more and more objects to those already in the air, and anticipating with ever greater suspense the inevitable loss of control'.⁴² But control never slips. Jonson exercises it through the familiar tripartite structure reinforced here by the introduction-explanation-illustration format of Aristophanic comedy.⁴³ More important, he observes the unities to striking effect. Within its classical format the action takes place (except for one small lapse) in the time required by performance. Jonson sets it not only in London but in the district of Blackfriars, specifically 'Your master's worship's house, here, in the Friars' (I.I.I.17). By establishing this location he confines the hectic events to a small space, further intensifying the bustle and confusion of the characters; and he identifies setting with playhouse (the Blackfriars theatre, probable site of this play's first production), characters with audience, and issues on stage with events in the city:

⁴⁰ Holdsworth, 'Every Man', Introduction, p. 26.

⁴¹ For additional discussion of the play's mechanics, see Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 142-3; Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama*, pp. 44-9; and Alvin B. Kernan, ed., *The Alchemist* (Yale edition, 1974), p. 243. Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, pp. 134-6, analyses the technique of the remarkable fourth act.

⁴² Holdsworth, 'Every Man', Introduction, p. 26.

⁴³ Boughner examines the tripartite structure in *The Devil's Disciple*, pp. 198-205; C. G. Thayer points out the Aristophanic pattern in 'Theme and structure in *The Alchemist*', *ELH* 26 (1959), 23-35.

Our scene is London, 'cause we would make known,
 No country's mirth is better than our own.
 No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,
 Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more . . .
 (Prologue, 5–8)⁴⁴

These issues are realized through the play's central metaphor of alchemy, 'science, philosophy, mystique, and con game'.⁴⁵ In its manifestations alchemy represents a number of different processes, from the fantasies by which people gratify their desires to the art which has distilled this comedy. Always it stands for change, and so the conservative dramatist presents it with more distrust than tolerance. Throughout the action rogues and gulls dispute its authenticity (with key arguments at 2.1 and 2.3, 4.6 and 4.7); at the ambivalent conclusion Lovewit treats it indulgently, 'though with some small strain / Of his own candour' (5.5.151–2).

While the comedy's principal metaphor represents change, its characters embody stasis, a contradiction promoting irony. Jonson fixes all of the victims and two of the rogues by social position, humour, distinctive idiom, and enough details to suggest their day-to-day lives. Again characters parody types in other genres, contributing to the play's metatheatricity.⁴⁶ At the top of the social hierarchy Sir Epicure Mammon (with his endlessly meaningful name) dominates the procession of gulls in the first two acts. His girth matches the dimensions of his fantasies, which he articulates in brilliant displays of Jonson's prosodic range. Generally he speaks with the kind of specificity that informs the whole comedy: 'The verse is laden with nouns and particularities, arcane terms and lists of various kinds, all miraculously quickened by the energy and aggressiveness of the speakers'.⁴⁷ But unusual inventiveness distinguishes Mammon's blank verse – its vigorous syntax, breadth of allusion, plentiful images – and it reveals in imaginative terms different aspects of his heart's desire. At the same time Mammon's

⁴⁴ Patrick R. Williams studies the play's use of space in 'Ben Jonson's satiric choreography', *RenD* n.s. 9 (1978), 130–9; and a number of critics discuss the implications of setting: for example, Paster, *The Idea of the City*, pp. 164–5; R. L. Smallwood, '“Here, in the Friars”: immediacy and theatricality in *The Alchemist*', *RES* n.s. 32 (1981), 142–60; Watson, *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy*, pp. 113–14; Peter Womack, *Ben Jonson* (Oxford and New York, 1986), pp. 115–19.

⁴⁵ Thayer, 'Theme and structure', p. 28.

⁴⁶ See Watson, *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy*, chapter 5, for a full account of the characters' interactions.

⁴⁷ Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, p. 149. There are several fine analyses of language in *The Alchemist*, including Ian Donaldson, 'Language, noise, and nonsense: *The Alchemist*' in Earl Miner, ed., *Seventeenth-Century Imagery: Essays on Uses of Figurative Language from Donne to Farquhar* (Berkeley, Calif., 1970), pp. 69–82 (reprinted in Holdsworth, 'Every Man', pp. 208–19).

idiom demonstrates how brilliantly Jonson transmutes many components from his vast comic repertoire into a unified and satirical comic impression.

As Mammon enters the second act, he introduces Surly to the house of alchemy with hyperbolic language from current lexicons of exploration and commerce: 'Now you set your foot on shore / In *novo orbe*; here's the rich Peru: / And there within, sir, are the golden mines' (2.1.1-3). Continuing to express both his wonder and his greed, the knight describes alchemical practices in lines that grow thick with fabulous or mythological allusions:

Both this, the Hesperian garden, Cadmus' story,
Jove's shower, the boon of Midas, Argus' eyes,
Boccace his Demogorgon, thousands more,
All abstract riddles of our stone. (2.1.101-4)

Between flights of fancy he states his philanthropic visions in plainer verse: 'I'll undertake, withal, to fright the plague / Out o' the kingdom, in three months' (2.1.69-70).

These visions seem to have diminished since he related them to Subtle (according to Subtle's account at 1.4.11-29); they no longer spark his imagination. By now sensual dreams have taken their place, filling his speeches as they fill his mind:

I will have all my beds blown up; not stuffed:
Down is too hard. And then, mine oval room,
Filled with such pictures as Tiberius took
From Elephantis, and dull Aretine
But coldly imitated. Then, my glasses,
Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse
And multiply the figures, as I walk
Naked between my *succubae*. (2.2.41-8)

Exaggeration, antiquity, and fable combine here to produce an obscene image with Mammon at its centre. Elaborating the image he continues to speak in Marlovian accents – the outmoded cadences of Tamburlaine and Faustus – and commercial terms, portraying himself as the indecent version of a romantic hero. Jonson sets off this diction with pragmatic lines of dialogue. By modulations of language and metre, he explodes Mammon's visionary schemes long before the rogues explode his project.

The energy which animates every part of *The Alchemist* slackens in the late plays. Nevertheless in *The Staple of News*, performed in 1626 after his ten-year absence from the public stage, Jonson endeavoured to carry out a more specialized task. When he wrote this comedy during the 1620s, in effect he entered a competition with his own earlier texts published in the 1616

folio – plays like *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* (which were in repertory during 1623 and 1624) – as well as the work of other dramatists. Consequently *The Staple of News* tests both the lasting values of his topical intrigues and the capacity of the Renaissance comic structure. Mislabelled a ‘dotage’ in Dryden’s criticism, it reveals a self-conscious artist still experimenting with his medium.⁴⁸

Typically Jonson composed *The Staple of News* from models, in particular morality play, Latin comedy, and masque. Again the action takes shape in three phases, and it observes the unities of time and place. But this comedy does not assimilate the different elements; instead it displays them conspicuously within the external structure. For instance the main narrative about Peniboy the son and heir, deriving from prodigal-son tradition along with the morality play, runs through the entire comedy; it depicts the trials of a young man learning to live the golden mean in an immoral world.

Borrowing the diction of courtly love, the hero in his romantic mode woos Pecunia. She and her waiting-women, more abstractions than ladies, originate in allegory. As the plot which contains them all grows increasingly complex, it admits elements of New Comedy, intrigues affecting the prodigal’s conflict with his uncle over Pecunia and setting up the dénouement with a ruse against the villain Picklock. In the climactic fourth act, when Peniboy [junior] succumbs to temptation, Jonson mixes features from three kinds of representations: the tavern scene from morality drama, rituals from the pre-Lenten carnival season, and components from masque. Of course satire also occupies large portions of the script. Jonson criticizes the spectators of his blank-verse comedy by framing the acts with an Induction and intermeans: prose exchanges by characters who sit on the stage like members of the audience. In addition, the first three acts ridicule the fledgling news industry; and the play repeatedly attacks other abuses of language such as jeering and cant.⁴⁹

Although Jonson sets the action in London, he gives it much less of the particularity which distinguished his previous city comedies. The lack of detail and presence of allegory suggest his deliberate attempt to emphasize more universal themes and to create a drama transcending its time.

⁴⁸ Douglas M. Lanier discusses Jonson’s self-reference in ‘The prison-house of the canon: allegorical form and posterity in Ben Jonson’s *The Staple of News*’, *MARDIE* 2 (1985), 253–67.

⁴⁹ The most thorough studies of traditions informing *The Staple of News* appear in the Introductions of two editions: Devra Rowland Kifer’s in the Regents Renaissance Drama series (Lincoln, Nebr., 1975) and Anthony Neil Parr’s in the Revels series (Manchester, 1989). Levin focuses on satire and the inter-plot connections, *The Multiple Plot*, pp. 184–91.

Ultimately *The Staple of News* does make its points about moral virtue in general terms familiar since Aristotle, yet its satire continues to reflect the political, economic, and social realities of contemporary England: developments in popular education, journalism, monopolies, and professional associations, even fashion. Most emphatically, however, the comedy as a whole evaluates current theatrical practices within the context of theatre history. It makes this assessment by juxtaposing modern and ancient forms of representation in a series of shows within the play; it allows their interaction to comment on their integrity.

When [Jonson] says that the Staple of News is a place ‘wherin the age may see her own folly’ he means the news office, his own play, and the succession of plays made within it where the spectators take the stage and in affirming their independence are made to display the ignorance of their judgment and their betrayal of true theatre . . . The several levels of the action . . . express with sharpening irony a hierarchy of values according to which the theatrical forms become more sophisticated and their substance more degenerate as we move in towards the masque.⁵⁰

Jonson’s contemporary John Marston had less opportunity to take the measure of contemporary drama in general or Renaissance comedy in particular. During a stormy theatrical career which lasted only a decade, Marston wrote one independent city comedy (and one of his last plays) *c.* 1603–1605: *The Dutch Courtesan*, performed first by the Queen’s Revels Children at the Blackfriars and revived in 1613 at court to celebrate the marriage of Princess Elizabeth to Frederick, the Elector Palatine. In plot, tone, and setting, this unsettled play must have seemed a strange wedding presentation. The dramatist’s emphasis on satire and potential disaster sometimes threatens to distort his comic structure.

Marston constructed his main action and one sub-plot from a variety of sources which he combined in novel ways. For the central plot he recast a French pastoral romance, a story in Nicolas de Montreux’s *Le premier livre des bergeries de Juliette* (1585), to dramatize ideas from two of Montaigne’s *Essays* about friendship and love (1603, trans. John Florio; I.xxvii and III.v). So Freevill and Malheureux, young gallants and friends, act out different concepts of love in relationships with virtuous Beatrice and wicked Franceschina. In this new version of a Plautine device – ‘a young man’s choice between *virgo* and *meretrix*, innocent maiden and wily courtesan’ – they choose between

⁵⁰ D. F. McKenzie, ‘“The Staple of News” and the late plays’ in William Blissett, Julian Patrick, and R. W. Van Fossen, eds., *A Celebration of Ben Jonson* (Toronto, 1973), pp. 102–3. This essay, pp. 83–128, gives a first-rate analysis of the comedy’s metatheatrical structure.

moral and immoral options, chastity or marriage and illicit sex.⁵¹ The sub-plot which reduces these serious issues to farce borrows its episodes from William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1566 and 1567) and Elizabethan drama. Contributing to each act, the roguish Cocledemoy gulls the puritan vintner Master Mulligrub and his wife; he reproduces Freevill's stratagem, tricking Malheureux for his own good, at the level of fabliau. Marston also invents another sub-plot about two down-to-earth lovers, Crispinella and Tysefew, whose sensible dialogue exposes pretension and sentimentality in the Malheureux-Freevill action.

During the first two acts, stoical Malheureux chooses badly, his self-control giving way before his lust for the Dutch courtesan, Franceschina. His bad judgement sets off the intrigues and counter-intrigues which call for a sensational resolution in the fifth act. Moreover his involvement with Franceschina makes prostitution a central focus in the play, bringing to life a metaphor introduced by the opening scenes. Through set speeches in Act 1, scenes 1 and 2, both Freevill and Cocledemoy link brothels with other forms of exploitation in the city. Echoing Freevill, Cocledemoy's 'oration' to the bawd Mary Faugh makes this connection and in the process defines the scope of Marston's satire:⁵²

List, then: a bawd, first for her profession or vocation, it is most worshipful of all the twelve companies; . . . whereas no trade or vocation profiteth but by the loss and displeasure of another – as the merchant thrives not but by the licentiousness of giddy and unsettled youth, the lawyer but by the vexation of his client, the physician but by the maladies of his patient – only my smooth-gumm'd bawd lives by others' pleasure, and only grows rich by others' rising. O merciful gain! O righteous income!

(1.2.29–48)

By locating the main and sub-plots in contemporary London – among its shops, exchanges, and markets, between its districts of crime and punishment – Marston sharpens not only his urban satire but also his analysis of moral and immoral love. Malheureux's passion has dire consequences in a world presented as real; his rationalized moral failings lead him, along with Mulligrub, to the point of execution. Nevertheless Marston places some distance between his philosophical and satiric commentaries by adjusting diction to subject-matter. On the whole his characters address general issues in the generalized language of moral precepts, psychology, and philosophical

⁵¹ Richard Horwich, 'Wives, courtesans, and the economics of love in Jacobean city comedy', *CompD* 7 (1973–74), 293. The most recent critical editions of *The Dutch Courtesan*, by Peter Davison (in the Fountainwell Drama Text series [Edinburgh, 1968] and M. L. Wine, and David Crane (in the New Mermaids series [London, 1997]), summarize sources.

⁵² Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, pp. 90–4, thoroughly describes the play's satire.

discourse; and they describe current affairs in earthy, often obscene particulars. With other modulations in verse and prose, diction also reveals the speakers in broad terms as witty or dull, true or false, idealistic or cynical.⁵³

Thomas Middleton generates subtler tensions in *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. At the mid-point of his career in 1613, he capped half a dozen city comedies with this skilfully crafted play before turning his hand to tragicomedy and tragedy. According to R. B. Parker, the pivotal text shows traces of all three genres (as well as city pageant). Written for a combined company of adult and boy actors – Lady Elizabeth’s Men and the Queen’s Revels Children – it appeared first at the Swan theatre. Its satire as well as its stage directions show the influence of Middleton’s previous experience in the private theatre.⁵⁴

Depending on no particular model or source, Middleton built his comic structure with materials ranging from Latin comedy and Spanish novel to pamphlets and folklore. He turned bits and pieces into a unified whole remarkable for its inventiveness. In this play the three-part form contains three major plots, one minor action, and assorted vignettes of Jacobean city life. As Richard Levin originally pointed out, all four intrigues centre on sex triangles involving one woman and two men; they connect through family ties, geographical proximity, and causal relationships. During the first three expository scenes, the main intrigues begin to gather associations with one another. While the action advances this complexity grows, augmented by the fourth plot and digressions. Twice ensemble scenes (at 3.2 and 5.4) bring the plots together, the second finally disconnecting the entire system with a startling marriage.⁵⁵

Like Marston’s courtesan, Middleton’s sex triangles focus the satire in his comedy: each of these arrangements has an economic base. In the frame narrative, a parodic version of New Comedy, Yellowhammer the goldsmith and his wife, Maudline, frustrate their daughter’s love to increase their wealth and status: they thrust Moll (with her dowry) at Sir Walter Whorehound despite her attachment to Touchwood junior. Although Sir Walter pursues this match to restore depleted funds, he has already fathered seven children on another man’s wife. In the sequence that epitomizes the play, cuckoldry is

⁵³ On language in *The Dutch Courtesan*, see Finkelpearl, *John Marston*, pp. 202–19, and Hamilton, ‘Language as theme’.

⁵⁴ Samuel Schoenbaum defines the play’s context with ‘*A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and Middleton’s city comedy’ in Josephine W. Bennett, Oscar Cargill, and Vernon Hall, Jr, eds., *Studies in the English Renaissance Drama* (New York, 1959), pp. 287–309; Parker gives background as well as the most thorough account of date and first performance in the Introduction to his Revels edition; and Gibbons discusses the mix of coterie and popular elements in the play in *Jacobean City Comedy*, pp. 127–30.

⁵⁵ See Levin, *The Multiple Plot*, pp. 194–202.

a business; Sir Walter supports the Allwit family, and Mr Allwit (the wittol) revels in his gain:

He gets me all my children, and pays the nurse
 Monthly or weekly; puts me to nothing,
 Rent, nor church-duties, not so much as the scavenger:
 The happiest state that ever man was born to!

(1.2.18–21)

Meantime Sir Walter's kinsman Sir Oliver Kix and his wife bargain with Touchwood Senior, a decayed but fertile gentleman, to help them conceive a child. Touchwood Senior complies successfully – and literally – in effect disinheriting Sir Walter. Finally the Yellowhammers' son, Tim, marries a cast-off mistress of Sir Walter's, led to believe her a Welsh gentlewoman, 'Heir to some nineteen mountains' (1.1.128).

Arising from interactions between the gentry and middle class, each triangle takes shape within a family disrupted or perverted by economic concerns. Financial contracts replace emotional bonds; sex becomes a commodity; and the familial unit turns into an enterprise. Within this play's geometry the plots come together to figure an age grown materialistic and competitive. Appropriately Middleton localizes this world in the old marketplace of London, a wide street in which 'the usual women "chased"... were the prostitutes whipped through it at a cart's tail'.⁵⁶

Since many topographical references have symbolic implications, they not only make the satire immediate but give the naturalism an allegorical edge. At one point, for example, Tim heads for Trig Stairs on the Thames (4.2.5). 'Trig' means not only a narrow passage but also a coxcomb, making the location suit the character. When the Allwits plan to take a house in the Strand (5.1.158), they anticipate their future by naming a street that is both fashionable and infamous for expensive courtesans. In a similar way the seasonal background, Lent to Easter, heightens the dramatist's ambivalent representation of moral and religious standards. It provides the context for interpreting many of the play's images – animals, fish, water – in terms of both death and resurrection, decay and renewal.

Gibbons concludes that Middleton created his art from a quarrel with himself, 'turning over the question "why is this feasible if it is immoral?"' (p. 130). This quarrel or argument sustains the delicate balance of other dramatic elements: characters both offensive and appealing, diction obscene and witty, events fantastic and real. As Middleton scorns this creation with irony

⁵⁶ Parker, *A Chaste Maid*, p. xlvii. My next paragraph summarizes Parker's conclusions about setting.

looking forward to Swift's, he laughs at it with the tolerance of Rabelais. The play's blank verse, extraordinarily flexible and sensitive to context, provides fluent expression for both points of view. Bringing the action to an end, for instance, it moves easily through an epitaph, a marriage ceremony, exposure of a gulling, and a final business agreement. Finally it stops with two speeches of equal length that juxtapose satire with comedy in the play's characteristic style:

TIM

I perceive then a woman may be honest
According to the English print, when she is
A whore in the Latin; so much for marriage and logic!
I'll love her for her wit, I'll pick out my runts there;
And for my mountains, I'll mount upon –

YELLOWHAMMER

So fortune seldom deals two marriages
With one hand, and both lucky; the best is,
One feast will serve them both! Marry, for room,
I'll have the dinner kept in Goldsmiths' Hall,
To which, kind gallants, I invite you all.

(5.4.108–117)

City comedies after Jonson and Middleton imitate their plays without the plays' intensity. In *The City Madam* (1632), for example, Philip Massinger echoes *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, picking up general themes like greed and hypocrisy rather than the complex particulars of form, setting, or diction. The later comedy, acted by the King's Men at the Blackfriars, depends less on details of city life to declare its satiric opinions.

Drawing on elements from contemporary drama, Massinger probably invented his comedy's double action, an arrangement that works variations on a single theme. First he introduces the immediate family of a merchant recently knighted, Sir John Frugal. As this sequence begins, a conversation between two of Sir John's apprentices reveals that his wife and daughters suffer from ambition, a seventeenth-century equivalent to pride: 'The want of [a title] / Swells my young Mistresses, and their madam mother / With hopes above their birth, and scale' (1.1.15–17). Soon the exposition sketches another relative equally typological: Sir John's prodigal brother, Luke, just returned from a debtors' prison and treated like a servant by the women in Frugal's home.

Until Act 2, scene 2 the women continue to display their follies, at last offending a pair of eligible suitors; by Act 2, scene 1 Luke indicates that his subdued behaviour conceals evil motives. The intrigue that will enlighten the

ladies and uncover Luke's villainy begins in Act 2, scene 3: Sir John and his cohort Lord Lacy cause Luke to think that he has become the manager of Sir John's estate. Of course Luke abuses this trust, the ladies, and everyone else who crosses his path. It takes an elaborate pageant in the fifth act to conclude the intrigue successfully.

A handful of scenes in one of the city's dissolute haunts parallels the main action at crucial points to emphasize its moral import: so a bawd and a prostitute in Act 3, scene 1 caricature the behaviour of Frugal's daughters with their suitors in Act 2, scene 2. While these episodes underscore motifs, however, they hardly localize events in the city. They add just a few items from London's topography and customs to the central plot's mention of shops and other buildings. Moreover, the biblical parables which fill this play counteract specific impressions of urban life. As Michael Neill shows, the comedy's argument elaborates well-known scriptural texts, and St Matthew's parable of the unjust debtor (Matthew 18.21–35) informs the entire action.⁵⁷

Massinger does place events chronologically with allusions to contemporary people and happenings. As a result his late city comedy directs its satire at broad targets: current manifestations of sin and breaches of decorum in the social hierarchy of Caroline England. In this play old landed wealth and new money get along when both observe traditional proprieties. Conflict arises from the transgression of principles not fixed by place or time, status or possessions. Consequently the dramatist arranges his characters in relation to moral and ethical norms; and his blank verse distinguishes them not merely by social rank but by their expression of spiritual values.

Departures

In plays like Chapman's *Gentleman Usher* and Marston's *Dutch Courtesan*, the prominence of certain generic elements – satire, treatise, even tragedy – now and then disturbs the comic structure. When these elements are especially striking or extensive, they threaten to interfere with comedy's most definitive phase: its anastrophe or happy resolution. Usually this effect seems unintentional and temporary, a result of the dramatist's preoccupation with the content of his work. But Shakespeare's seventeenth-century comedies – *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Measure for Measure* – purposefully unsettle the genre: 'Shakespeare is transforming the traditions of comedy into something, still called comedy, which challenges all those

⁵⁷ See 'The tongues of angels': charity and the social order in *The City Madam* in Howard, *Philip Massinger*, pp. 193–220.

many traditions'.⁵⁸ Each play subverts its folkloric sources, legend or romantic tale, as it undermines both the narrative and dialectic order of the comic form. Relying on different strategies, each proves dramatic comedy and related traditions inadequate representations of human experience.

Measure for Measure, written c. 1604 and influenced by the accession of King James I, defies generic expectations with unwavering singleness of purpose. At the level of narrative it begins with an exposition that introduces ambiguous characters and events; continues with an unpredictable intrigue that ignites and subdues passion by calculated deceit; ends with a resolution that leaves six characters silently uncommitted to their fates. At the level of dialectic 'the play avoids good arguments and clear theses, and instead proceeds by means of indirections, good arguments badly put, specious arguments and desperate stratagems'.⁵⁹ Shakespeare dramatizes the administration of justice in these uneasy terms, perhaps stressing inadequacies in the art form to reflect for the benefit of the new king inadequacies in the legal system.

Often the uncertainties that transform comic structure in *Measure for Measure* do not arise from the play's generic mixture, despite the prevalence of satire and potential for calamity. Rather they originate primarily in language: denotations continually point in one direction, connotations and style in another. When the Duke rationalizes the folk convention of the 'Disguised Ruler' and explains his hurried departure from Vienna in Act 1, scene 3, for instance, he claims that he intends to restore legal order through his deputy Angelo. Yet his words emphasize serious deficiencies in the law and contempt for the people it governs; they describe painful constraints on unruly animals: 'We have strict statutes and most biting laws, / The needful bits and curbs to headstrong jades, / Which for this fourteen years we have let slip' (1.3.19–21). A moment later they reduce the immediate gravity of the present situation through personifications, absurd images, and a combination of diction and metre which sounds flippant:

so our decrees,
Dead to infliction, to themselves are dead,
And Liberty plucks Justice by the nose,
The baby beats the nurse, and quite athwart
Goes all decorum. (27–31)

In the end the harsh laws seem a bad alternative to current misbehaviour, an unsatisfying explanation for leaving a deputy in charge. Soon the Duke

⁵⁸ David Daniell, 'Shakespeare and the traditions of comedy' in Wells, *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*, p. 117.

⁵⁹ Paul Hammond, 'The argument of *Measure for Measure*', *ELR* 16 (1986), 497.

admits that he has 'Moe reasons for this action' (48), and he concludes the scene by expressing his intention to test Angelo: 'Hence shall we see / If power change purpose, what our seemers be' (53-4).

Once the Duke appears to have left Vienna the 'Monstrous Ransom' or 'Corrupt Magistrate' plot gets under way, a narrative that Shakespeare borrowed mainly from George Whetstone's comedy *Promos and Cassandra* (1578). Vincentio's substitute demands sexual favours from the novice Isabella in exchange for releasing her brother from the death penalty. Between the second and third acts an intense psychological drama plays itself out, the words and cadences revealing naturalistically the speakers' confusion:

ANGELO

What's this? What's this? Is this her fault, or mine?
The tempter, or the tempted, who sins most, ha?
Not she; nor doth she tempt; but it is I
That, lying by the violet in the sun,
Do as the carrion does, not as the flower,
Corrupt with virtuous season. (2.2.163-8)

At the same time language also betrays dark, unconscious impulses. It exposes Isabella's sensuality, for example, as she defines her chastity in sexual language:

That is, were I under the terms of death,
Th'impression of keen whips I'd wear as rubies,
And strip myself to death as to a bed
That longing have been sick for, ere I'd yield
My body up to shame. (2.4.100-4)

When the Duke intervenes at the centre of the action, this medium changes abruptly. Prose displaces verse, initially with old-fashioned euphuism: 'The hand that hath made you fair hath made you good. The goodness that is cheap in beauty makes beauty brief in goodness; but grace, being the soul of your complexion, shall keep the body of it ever fair' (3.1.179-83). Addressed to Isabella just after her most hysterical outburst, these lines clearly announce their hollowness with their artificiality. Again, what the Duke means differs from what he says, and the disjunction facilitates his manipulating of events.

During the course of this play Vincentio never makes an unequivocal statement of his purpose. At best he relates the mechanics of a stratagem, not its object. Yet he fails to communicate even this much to most of the other characters. While he equivocates his subjects frequently express more than they realize, disclosing vagaries of their minds and hearts beyond his control.

Shakespeare arranges his materials in a narrative about authority contending with human nature, organizing situations – especially sexual relationships – to mirror one another in ironic ways. Yet decisive causal factors generally remain hidden not only from many characters but also from the audience. If these witnesses can finally comprehend the progression of events, they can hardly apprehend its rationale. *Measure for Measure* flaunts the logic implied by authority and art with the realities of human behaviour. In Frye's words (but not his positive sense), the dramatist writes 'a comedy about comedy' as he turns his attention to tragedy and romance.⁶⁰ The familiar comic sequence disintegrates as it advances, unequal to the stresses of Shakespeare's Vienna.

Withstanding such reversals and competition from other genres, English Renaissance comedy flourished until the theatres closed. It had become a strong presence both as a full-scale kind and as a mode or partial kind: 'Modes have always an incomplete repertoire, a selection only of the corresponding kind's features, and one from which overall external structure is absent'.⁶¹ In the early Tudor period the comic mode was pronounced in certain interludes, and from the mid-sixteenth century on it infiltrated other dramatic genres. By the end of the century, comedy appeared regularly in history plays and tragedies; often it unexpectedly shifted perspective on plot or characters. Clown scenes in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* re-enact the protagonist's demonic bargain to emphasize its absurdity; episodes of carnival in the anonymous *Famous Victories of Henry V* and Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays multiply images of political disorder throughout the kingdom. Comedy becomes 'a possible starting point, or a running accompaniment, or even a constituent element, of Shakespeare's tragic vision'.⁶² Of course the mode contributed vitally to the new seventeenth-century genre of tragicomedy.

Considering English Renaissance comedy as a whole or in part, critics have sometimes asked 'Why now? and Why this way?' Why did romantic comedy prosper at the end of the sixteenth century and city comedy at the beginning of the seventeenth? What made the genre so popular through most of the era? So far the general evidence – many and various plays from both public and private theatres – suggests few specific answers. In this case modern genre theory often raises more questions.⁶³

⁶⁰ *The Myth of Deliverance: Reflections on Shakespeare's Problem Comedies* (Toronto and Buffalo, N.Y., 1983), p. 25.

⁶¹ Fowler, *Kinds of Literature*, p. 107.

⁶² Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies: 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Hamlet', 'Othello', and 'King Lear'* (Princeton, N.J., 1979), p. 55.

⁶³ Quotation from Leinwand, *The City Staged*, p. 20. For additional questions, see William W. E. Slights, 'Unfashioning the man of mode: comic countergenre in Marston, Jonson, and Middleton', *RenD* n.s. 15 (1984), 69–70. For a theory about the rise and fall of romantic

Although this brief survey cannot trace the many cultural sources of Tudor or Stuart comedy, it should perhaps take a cue from Lyly towards one or two reasonable conclusions about the genre. According to Lyly's Prologue to *Midas* (c. 1589), a mixed theatre audience – soldiers, courtiers, countrymen – wanted to see themselves reflected in mixed forms of theatre. The playwrights may have been responding to this demand not only when they mingled dramatic kinds, but also when they exploited the versatile comic genre. For some reason comedy enjoyed unusual freedom of expression: 'of all the dramatic kinds, comedy was the least controlled, and was allowed, even by classical precept, the greatest variety of style'.⁶⁴ As Eliot observes in his essay on Massinger, such freedom invites experimentation: 'In comedy, as a matter of fact, a greater variety of methods were discovered and employed than in tragedy . . . [B]oth individual temperament, and varying epochs, made more play with comedy'.⁶⁵

The best playwrights conducted their experiments on the times, analysing social conditions through art. If their romantic comedy took an outsider's view of court life, their city comedy gave an insider's assessment of urban experience. For several years these two forms overlapped, but finally one supplanted the other to register political change: a patriarchal style of monarchy, increasing economic and social fluctuation. Other types of comedies, diverse and eclectic, filled the space around these two forms, commenting on everything from middle-class courtship and marriage to the gullibility of country gentlemen. Even the second-class imitations of first-class comedies mirrored audiences' concerns in the form whose resolution dispels anxiety. All in all the genre of English Renaissance comedy proved to be in itself a mingle-mangle which represented the hodgepodge of contemporary life, a gallimaufry which satisfied its age.

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comedy, see Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (London, 1986), chapter 1; on the progress of city comedy, see Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy*, chapters 2–4.

⁶⁴ Bradbrook, *Growth and Structure*, p. 43.

⁶⁵ Reprinted from *Essays on Elizabethan Drama* (1932) in R. J. Kaufmann, *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism* (New York, 1961), p. 351.

frequently anthologized. The chapter refers to critical editions of two other plays which have also been anthologized several times each: Henry Porter, *The Two Angry Women of Abington*, ed. Marianne Brish Evett (1980), and the anonymous *Merry Devil of Edmonton*, ed. William Amos Abrams (1942). I quote John Marston's *Dutch Courtesan*, ed. M. L. Wine (1965) from the Regents Renaissance Drama series, and Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, ed. R. B. Parker (1969) from the Revels series.

Scholarship and criticism

General concepts of Renaissance genres in this essay have been shaped in part by Rosalie Colie, *The Resources of Kind* (1973); Heather Dubrow, *Genre* (1982); and Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, ed., *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation* (1986).

For helpful studies on English Renaissance comedy, see the works by Bradbrook, Braunmuller and Bulman, Doran, Gibbons, and Leggatt in the Bibliography's section 'General critical studies and collections of criticism'. Two books which deal with city comedy are Theodore B. Leinwand, *The City Staged: Jacobean Comedy, 1603–1613* (1986), and Gail Kern Paster, *The Idea of the City in the Age of Shakespeare* (1985), chapters 6 and 7. Three volumes about Shakespearian comedy throw light on the Renaissance genre as a whole: Maurice Charney, ed., *Shakespearean Comedy* (1980); Leo Salingar, *Shakespeare and the Traditions of Comedy* (1974); and Alexander Leggatt, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy* (2002), particularly the essays by David Galbraith, 'Theories of comedy', pp. 3–17, and Janette Dillon, 'Elizabethan comedy', pp. 47–63. See also the essays by Don E. Wayne, Gail Kern Paster, Mary Beth Rose, and Martin Butler in Mary Beth Rose, ed., *Renaissance Drama as Cultural History* (1990), and Mario DiGangi, 'Asses and wits: the homoerotics of mastery in satiric comedy', *ELR* 25 (1995), 179–208.

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9

ROBERT N. WATSON

Tragedy

Tragedy . . . openeth the greatest wounds, and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue [and] teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded.

Sir Philip Sidney, 'A Defence of Poetry' (1582)¹

this majestical roof fretted with golden fire, why, it appeareth to me nothing but a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculties . . . and yet to me what is this quintessence of dust?

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.2.301–8

A theory of Renaissance tragedy

ART exists for a reason; it is not mere decoration, but a necessary worker in the necessary business of a human culture. No system of thought – mythological, religious, scientific – has yet represented reality to its believers so fully, accurately, and coherently that the system never fails,² that the gold roofs beneath which we stage our glories never crash down around us. Most forms of art are used to reconcile apparent contradictions in a culture's consensual view of reality; some radical forms, tragedy in particular, serve to acknowledge those contradictions and reconcile us to the problems and pain they generate. In times of radical change, tragedy may therefore represent a precious alternative to religious fundamentalism and its accompanying reactionary politics, which alluringly offer a collective denial of the imperatives of such change and the very existence of moral complication.

¹ Sir Philip Sidney, 'A Defence of Poetry', ed. J. A. Van Dorsten (Oxford, 1966), p. 45.

² Cf. the 'Incompleteness Proof' of Kurt Gödel, which (in an intriguing anticipation of deconstructive criticism) indicates that any system of unified explanation inevitably develops internal incoherencies; see his *On Formally Undecidable Principles*, trans. B. Meltzer (London, 1962).

Renaissance scholars generally understood tragedy as a narrative, often historically based, describing a fall from greatness to calamity. Usually such a narrative carried a warning against political or moral errors embodied by the protagonist (an allegorical function shared with the late-medieval morality plays), or purged destructive passions from readers and spectators to allow the triumph of reason (a psychological function associated with Aristotelian *catharsis*). Whether the essence of tragedy is thus the delivery of a message, with the medium as merely its seductive vehicle, or instead a process, irreducible to paraphrase, in which the medium is itself essential, remains a vexed question that divides modern scholars into those who read to isolate a thematic meaning, and those others who emphasize the full complexity of dramatic performances and interpretive ambiguities.

Cultural theorists tend to emphasize the barriers between past and present, scolding readers for attempting to experience Renaissance tragedies as accessible expressions of precious and lasting insights. The twenty-first century certainly differs from the sixteenth – but not so entirely as to prevent us from recognizing the kinds of conflicts its tragedies explore, or to deprive those tragedies of any relevance to the conflicts we ourselves face. A respectful reading of history does not require a reductive reading of tragedy. Those who conclude that art is merely a subordinate agent of an essentially economic social entity forget that societies face cognitive crises as well as political ones (though they often run in parallel). The commonly cited pressures towards the realignment of hierarchy and the redistribution of wealth are not the only ones that threaten the stability of a culture; without the complex guidance of art to help us process our experiences coherently, our daily experience would consist of a chaos as devastating as any rebellion.

Those who claim, more broadly, that human beings perceive wholly different kinds of reality in different historical periods, that shifting ideologies and epistemes necessitate a kind of archaeological detachment from the literary artifacts of the Renaissance, overlook the way drama, as a communal representation of human experience, itself refutes such exaggerated exclusions. The history of drama shows no direct line of survival from the great flowering in ancient Greece to Elizabethan England; the very fact that tragedy and comedy reassert themselves (like stubborn plants) after long burial, however, indicates that something persistent in Western civilization demands those particular forms of representation. Even two thousand years before Shakespeare, drama portrayed human traits and situations that still seem very familiar: forms of the democratic impulse and totalitarian reaction competing for political power, with recognizable kinds of schemers and idealists on both sides; married couples squabbling over money and the perpetual

lure of infidelity; sibling rivalries and oedipal conflicts; losses that are still agonizing and (perhaps most remarkable) jokes that are still funny.

Cultural theorists also warn that 'essentialism', which claims to articulate absolute truths about 'human nature', ignores cultural, class, and historical difference. Certainly nothing is quite universal – West African tribesmen offered some unorthodox interpretations of the Hamlet story³ – but Shakespearean drama originally reached an audience that stretched all the way across the class spectrum, and the same drama has continued to command fascination (though its focus undergoes revealing shifts) over several historical periods. The plays have survived translation into print, into foreign languages, even into cultures as foreign as that of modern Japan, where the Shakespeare industry thrives.

So, without becoming essentialists, readers of drama can be durationists, believing that important aspects of human experience evolve as gradually as our bodily form. Tragedy typically reminds its spectators of something they share and commonly struggle to forget: the progress from aspiration to death, from moments that promise glory (even if they are only the infantile fantasies of omnipotence) to eventual surrender (even if it is only the banal fact of mortality). Tragedy also attunes itself to the sharings of primal guilt, in the practice of ritual sacrifice it essentially re-enacts, as well as in durable parables like that of Oedipus.

Several recent studies of Renaissance literature have been concerned with the notion that the unified 'subject', the emotional, volitional, or psychological self, was simply not invented until the seventeenth century.⁴ It is difficult to understand how anyone who has read even such standard and various works as the poems of Sappho, the Book of Job, the Meditations of Marcus Aurelius, and the Confessions of St Augustine can accept so extreme an assertion. Can self-consciousness and self-knowledge be such radically new notions if the central admonitory wisdom on the most revered oracle of the ancient world (at Delphi) was 'Know Thyself'? To insist that historical changes have altered only a small percentage of human consciousness and conduct is not to deny that even such fractional changes may be significant, or to deny that some forms of art will be especially concerned with exploring

³ Laura Bohannon, 'Shakespeare in the bush' in James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy, eds., *Conformity and Conflict* (3rd edn; Boston, Mass., 1977), pp. 13–23.

⁴ See for example Belsey, *The Subject of Tragedy*, Joel Fineman, *Shakespeare's Perjured Eye: The Invention of Poetic Subjectivity in Shakespeare's Sonnets* (Berkeley, Calif., 1986), and John Lee, *Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' and the Controversies of Self* (New York, 2000). Most such arguments originate from Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), and are strongly challenged by Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, 1989).

precisely those fractions. Among cultural historians the idea that the Renaissance produced a discernible increase in individualism has been a valuable commonplace for well over a century.⁵ But that hardly justifies reducing Renaissance tragedies from immediate visions of life to alienated evidence of change.

The spectacle and imminence of death must surely have reminded people that they had integral individual existences, as a union of body and soul. 'Only we die in earnest – that's no jest', concluded Sir Walter Raleigh; clever fictions cannot impinge very far on biological facts. Even taxes have been with us throughout recorded history, on tablet, papyrus, paper, and computer disk, with similar rationalizations on the part of the collectors and similar complaints and evasions on the part of the taxed; it seems perverse to insist that those other eternal verities, sex and death, are much newer inventions and more completely subject to transient ideologies.⁶ Humanists in the Renaissance understandably construed the classical world as an Other, yet they worked confidently towards a reconciliation. Modern humanists need to do the same, instead of estranging the past: a period of racism, terrorism, economic injustice, ecological disaster, and potential nuclear war demands that we expand our sense of kinship and our faith that communication and co-operation are possible.

English Renaissance tragedy repeatedly portrays the struggle of a remarkable individual against implacable, impersonal forces, a struggle no less impressive for its ultimate failure. The protagonists can be heroes even when they are not triumphant or highly virtuous, because the defeat of their aspirations (however tainted with blasphemy or selfishness) reflects a frustration common to the human psyche and heightened by the mixed messages of that culture. The aspiring mind of Faustus – an archetypal Renaissance man – confronts the restraints of conventional Christian morality and the banal facts of the physical universe; Macbeth – one of the most intensely subjective characters ever created – confronts literal prophecy, recorded history, and cyclical nature. Though no single paradigm can accurately describe the range of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedies, a remarkable number of the memorable heroes are destroyed by some version of this confrontation between

⁵ The classic work in this regard is Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance* (1860; reprinted New York, 1960).

⁶ By the same token, those who claim that human experience and behaviour are historical contingencies shaped by language and have no fundamental reality outside it must consider it a remarkable coincidence that other species, lacking anything accepted as language, engage in so many complex social and sexual behaviour patterns distinctly congruent to those of humans.

the desiring personal imagination and the relentless machinery of power, whether social, natural, or divine. The revenger is denied the satisfactions of true justice by civil law, political privilege, and Christian principles; the malcontent is denied respect and advancement by the perceived stupidity of his hierarchical society. Noble soldiers and lovers cannot escape the canker of envy and connivance in human nature, or the persistent pressures towards dynastic marriage and historical change in human society. And great spirits of all kinds face inevitable extinction by mortality, the ultimate power-broker and person-breaker.

No wonder English Renaissance tragedy rehearses obsessively this pattern of betrayal; in all other theatres of life, the liberated self was colliding with powerful impersonal machinery. Renewed human innovation and exploration were constantly running up against the stubbornness and mysteriousness of physical nature; thematically, *Doctor Faustus* (1588–92) was overdetermined by its surrounding culture. People displaced from hereditary feudal identities and employments were harshly repressed as they attempted to enter new arenas and arrogate new personal status; *Macbeth* (1606) (along with a variety of other Shakespeare plays in which the natural order punishes ambition)⁷ thus offers a parable about the destructive tendencies of a society pursuing the contradictory goals of growth and stability. Worldly pleasure and individual identity – both increasingly valued in this period⁸ – were never far from destruction by the plagues of the time, bubonic and otherwise. The intense pieties Protestantism instilled in the individual conscience were generally understood to be unavailing against God's inscrutable predestination of damnation.

Agonizing as these contradictions may have been, they nonetheless generated the kind of dual vision that enabled artists to convert agony into extraordinary beauty. The triumphs of Renaissance art, in a variety of media, depend on the conjunction of an active religious faith, a quest for transcendence, with an evolving science of realistic observation, a quest for empirical truth.⁹ Furthermore, the same tension that enabled the greatness of Renaissance art made tragedy – inasmuch as tragedy draws its native energy from cultural schisms – uniquely capable of exploiting that opportunity. The most joyous art finds ideal beauty in real things; tragic art shows ideal beauty in collision with real things.

⁷ Robert N. Watson, *Shakespeare and the Hazards of Ambition* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), *passim*.

⁸ See the documentation and explication of this intensifying conflict in Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York, 1982).

⁹ Murray Roston, *The Sixteenth Century* (New York, 1982), makes this argument with eloquent concision.

One traditional theory attributes the literary masterpieces of Renaissance England to a new national identity and an upsurge in national confidence – as if artistic quality fluctuated in the same way as the stock market, and for much the same reasons. Certainly England achieved new prosperity during the mid-sixteenth century through the cloth trade and the commercial and colonial uses of navigation. But it would be cruelly untrue to the experience of vast numbers of English men and women to depict this as a time of universal comfort and prosperity. As in most social reorganizations and economic booms, many human lives were squandered or devoured by the system, and certainly the people who tried to make their living as authors were almost always scraping for their meals. A converse theory has therefore developed, suggesting that literature necessarily evolved as an outlet for protest – and for regulating protest – against the emergent horrors of capitalism and centralized power.

Fortunately it is possible to avoid the old-fashioned scholarly élitism of claiming that Renaissance art succeeded because some bright lads studied the sublime classics, without resorting to the current proletarian chic that makes culture an economic machine in which authors perform only alienated labour and produce work of purely arbitrary value. Both assertions are just true enough to mislead. Perhaps the remarkable development of English literature in the later sixteenth century, like the triumphs of the arts in Italy in the preceding centuries, depended on the constant tension between the material changes reshaping daily life and the stable abstract authority of classical art and morality. (The English language itself was perfectly poised in the Renaissance to express this polarity, as an earthy Anglo-Saxon strain mixed with the Latinate diction encouraged by the humanist élite.) When one complete and valued world-view (the native Christian legacy) is actively tested against another (the revered classical example), and when new practical problems (merchandizing, manufacturing, navigation, optics, epidemiology) present themselves in a context imbued with established and evolving religious faith, powerful new perceptions are inevitable, and so are the artistic innovations that will seek to assimilate and expand those perceptions.

Medieval Western culture – roughly speaking, of course – was unified across different times and nations and topics by a reliance on authority; in both science and religion, received wisdom had priority over empirical observation. In the Renaissance, science and religion are actively transformed, as both nature and God become more accessible to the immediate experience of individuals. Art history reveals an essential difference – corresponding to the tragic conflict – between medieval and Renaissance painting. Flat, iconic portrayals of Jesus and Mary yield to Renaissance *pietà* and crucifixion scenes with ordinary faces in real pain, and in the background real cities,

rocks, and forests. What makes Leonardo da Vinci's religious works so enthralling if not their intimate involvement of the spiritual in a world that we recognize as intensely real? It is impossible to say whether discoveries such as perspective are cause or effect of a fresh way of seeing, but clearly they are part of an extremely powerful cycle.

The history of philosophy reveals the same sort of dialectic. On one side are the optimistic spiritual reconceptions emerging from the Italian Renaissance: Ficino's neoplatonism and Pico's 'Oration' suggest that human beings can exalt themselves, by reason and love, into something resembling divinity. On the other side are the documents of the Counter-Renaissance,¹⁰ such as Machiavelli's *The Prince*, which studiously avoids transcendent moral reference in favour of pragmatic political tactics, in much the way painters forsook ideal faces in favour of realistic ones. As the relative values of art and nature become prominently contested,¹¹ the theory that art enables and records a mystical union between the human soul and divine harmonies collides with a theory that defines art as the skill and practice of holding a mirror up to nature. The debate remains active even today, as a function of the continuing tragic disjunction between our spiritual sense that each person is a universe of eternal meaning, and our practical suspicion that each person is instead a transient and largely redundant event in the meaningless functions of nature.

Defining tragedy is impossible, because the word has meant different things at different times.¹² Even a broad ethical definition would involve articulating all the complexities and extremities of human suffering. The footprints of Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche in the dust hardly assuage a critic's sense of rushing in where angels might fear to tread. Nevertheless, the correlations between these theories and Renaissance practice deserve explication, particularly because the Renaissance example reconciles some of their apparent discrepancies.

Aristotle writes in the *Poetics* that tragedies must represent a complete, serious, and important action that rouses and then purges (by *catharsis*) fear and pity in the spectator by showing a central character moving from happiness to misery through some frailty or error (*hamartia*). The precise

¹⁰ Hiram Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York, 1950), explicates this dark counter-current to humanist rationality and optimism. The works of Montaigne are especially informative about the development of selfhood and scepticism in this period.

¹¹ Edward Taylor, *Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature* (New York, 1964), *passim*.

¹² See for example the discussion of the medieval variations of the term in H. A. Kelly, 'Chaucer and Shakespeare on tragedy', *Leeds Studies in English* 20 (1989), 191–206.

translations and applications of these terms are still hotly debated, but they certainly seem compatible with Renaissance tragedies that enabled their audiences to examine and exorcise their collective frustrations by watching a hero fail to fulfil his glorious aspirations. If there is any value in the supposed etymology of the word ‘tragedy’ from the Greek *tragoidia* or goat-play, it lies in the recognition that the tragic hero is essentially another version of the sacrifice offered throughout known human history to appease an angry god – in other words, both to acknowledge and to repress a contradiction in the culture’s agreed way of perceiving reality.

The desperate Renaissance struggle to reconcile the beautiful aspirations of the mind with the fierce demands of the body corresponds to the battle which Nietzsche identified as the essence of tragedy: between Apollo (the god of civilization, rationality, daylight) and Dionysius (the god of frenzy, passion, midnight). Renaissance philosophy and theology highlighted the perplexing juxtaposition of the angelic human being, a creature of reason and art under the paternal benevolence of God, with the human being as a beast of appetite, subject to God’s terrible anger.

Hegel argues that tragedy is generated when a heroic individual becomes trapped between the conflicting demands of two godheads, between two sets of values that are each imperative and mutually exclusive. Thus, in Sophocles’ *Antigone*, the heroine’s familial and religious obligation to bury her brother collides with the demands of state authority. Similarly, Aeschylus’ Orestes (facing a dilemma that has significant echoes in *Hamlet*) is violently torn between two aspects of his filial obligations, each advocated by a supernatural power.¹³ These tragic figures cannot do good without doing evil; they are doomed, not by a random predestination or bad luck, but by a situation in which all roads lead to wrong. The tragedy lies not in the final destruction of the hero – indeed, many classical tragedies end with the hero in a state of redemption – but in the impossible conflicts the hero’s particular situation serves to reveal. Tragedy thus allows its audience not only to confront its fears of suffering, but also to confront the half-recognized contradictions in its assumptions about truth and justice. The tragic genre voices the shared anxiety of a society enduring earthquakes generated by some ideological equivalent of tectonic plates, moving against each other with immense destructive power, and thereby threatening the stability of every superstructure built upon them.

Hegel distinguishes ancient tragedy from modern – in which category he includes those of the Renaissance – as focusing more on the conflict of

¹³ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, reprinted in Anne and Henry Paolucci, eds., *Hegel on Tragedy* (New York, 1962), pp. 177–8.

values than on the personality of the character enduring them. This contrast between the classical and Renaissance versions of tragedy becomes less troublesome if we recognize that an increase in subjective personal identity is itself at the core of many profound Renaissance cultural conflicts. Protestantism itself can be viewed as a personalizing of salvation, away from group sacramentalism. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, anxieties about self-made men, exalted by new money and fine clothes, manifest themselves not only in sumptuary laws,¹⁴ but also in comedies that deflate pretentious foreigners and fops, and in tragedies that feature the depredations of unprincipled Italianate schemers who (whether called Machiavel as in Marlowe's 1589 *The Jew of Malta*, compared to one as in Middleton's 1624 *A Game at Chess*, or merely acting like one as in Shakespeare's 1604 *Othello*) feed on the naïve trust of a traditional social order. Perhaps most important of all, the recognition of unique inward experience made the prospect of its annihilation much more terrifying. The fact that Renaissance tragedies end in death thus may not mean that the playwrights mistook personal disaster for the real meaning of tragedy; instead, death itself may have been the culminating instance of the kind of tragic conflict generated by this culture: the destruction of the feeling individual through collision with unfeeling larger orders. Indeed, the chief consolation at the end of many Renaissance tragedies is the recognition that the hero has reasserted his or her personal will and identity in the very face of death.

The seemingly facile formula that defines comedies as plays ending in marriage and tragedies as plays ending in death corresponds significantly to two other theories. One theory describes comedy as cyclical and tragedy as linear.¹⁵ Another describes comedy as focused on types and tragedy on individuals. What underlies all these formulations is the perception that the story of each human life is essentially tragic, a plot of rise and fall, charting the linear path of each unique individual towards its mortal demise. Comedy escapes this tragic pattern by showing that some basic human qualities survive across generations, whether in the genetic likenesses produced by fertile marriage, or by the recurrence of behavioural patterns that override individuality (Jonson's 'humours', for example). The individual hero of comedy or romance may triumph on behalf of his progeny or his social class (or both, as in Dekker's 1599 *The Shoemaker's Holiday*); in history plays he may triumph on behalf of his country (like the Henry V of the 1586 *Famous Victories* or Shakespeare's 1599

¹⁴ Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 27–9, 184–8, 547–81, discusses conspicuous consumption and its relation to the class system.

¹⁵ See for example Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, N.J., 1957).

version); but when the individual hero is principally important for inward qualities of love, courage, or imagination, the play becomes a tragedy of extinction.

A history of English Renaissance tragedy

The story of English Renaissance tragedy is usually told diachronically as a literary genealogy, rather than as a synchronic matrix of social pressures. What might be called the authorized version of that story is full of speculations that have petrified into assumptions through frequent repetition, but it is worth telling, provided we understand that many different stories can be told about the same historical phenomenon, and that the leap from facts to explanations is always hazardous. Even the most conscientiously ‘objective’ histories eventually prove more revealing about the culture that made them than about the culture they purport to describe, and the following summary will doubtless prove no exception.

Provoked by the excesses of decadent Roman spectacle, the increasingly powerful Christian church effectively abolished theatre in Western Europe by the sixth century AD. For several hundred years, tragedy survived only in the form of Mass, with Christ as the tragic hero, priests as chorus, and congregations as audience. Both the history of Jesus and the Christian story of human history follow a tragic pattern of early greatness, betrayal into death by human frailty, and a palliating suggestion that the suffering earns transcendence and redemption. Gradually, dormant elements of theatre began to re-emerge around that core. As the church expanded its repertoire of indoctrinating devices, responsive readings (such as the ninth-century *Quem quaeritis* trope) became elaborated into liturgical drama, moved from the church to outdoor festivals (as with the early Corpus Christi plays), where English replaced Latin, and the scenes were woven together into entire ‘cycles’ of the biblical story. To the extent that these were affirmations of orthodox beliefs through familiar narratives, they lacked the interrogatory power of tragedy, but suspense and villainy became possible once these performances were liberated from the precise narrative of the Bible and the sanctity of the church-house.

In the fifteenth century, amid growing disputes about the mechanisms of salvation (and growing proto-Reformation resistance to the idolatrous representation of sacred figures), the morality play emerged, an allegorical genre in which a variety of personified abstractions battle for the soul of a figure known as Everyman or Mankind. Morality plays (and the succeeding ‘moral interludes’) portray the struggle between good and evil in psychological rather than historical terms, though the genre quickly proved congenial

to political controversy.¹⁶ By describing the protagonist as a microcosm of universal forces, it may have anticipated the tragic formula in which the hero internalizes contradictions dangerously at large in the culture. Furthermore, the conjunction of morality plays with historical and religious re-enactments may have prepared drama for the crucial Renaissance conjunction of abstract moral thought with realistic personal presence.

Rapid economic change and growth – perhaps the emergence of capitalism itself – along with radical expansions in science and world exploration made Elizabethan England ripe for artistic innovation. Exciting but dangerous notions of individualism seeped in from the Continent. The progress of urbanization and commercialism made the theatre a viable new industry, less constrained by aristocratic conventions than poetry or prose romance (though portrayals of the emergent middle class tended towards chauvinistic propaganda or satiric comedy rather than tragedy). Although English history and classical stories were already providing some tragic material, the catalyst that precipitated the great tragedies of horror and revenge out of this mixture was the drama of Seneca, a Stoic philosopher from the first century AD. Long available to the intellectual élite, these tragedies achieved a renewed impact through their translation into English in the second half of the sixteenth century, as part of the general revival of classical learning that gives the Renaissance its name (juxtaposed with ‘early modern’ – the term favoured by some recent scholars – this name confirms that the era functioned as a fulcrum between the old and new in Western culture). Seneca’s tragedies, based on Greek mythology, conveniently combined classical stature with sensationalism; revenge-motives took the place of classical polytheistic or fatalistic ideas that might have been harder for the Renaissance to assimilate.

This rediscovery might have meant nothing if the Elizabethans were not already developing dramatic techniques adequate to exploit it. Medieval *de casibus* tragedies – stories of the fall of great ones, on the relentlessly turning wheel of fortune – continued to be told in prose form, particularly as cautionary tales about young prodigals or bad kings. Thomas Sackville, the most important contributor to an influential collection of these tales called

¹⁶ Skelton’s *Magnificence* (1515–23), *Respublica* (1553), and Bale’s *King John* (1538/1558–62) were staged equivalents of modern political cartoons; one could warn Henry VIII against the schemes of Wolsey as well as Humanum Genus against the schemes of the Devil. The legacy of the morality play is obvious in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* and Dekker’s *Old Fortunatus* (1599), and more subtly pervades countless other tragedies of the period. Bernard Spivack, *The Allegory of Evil* (New York, 1958), and Alan Dessen, *Jonson’s Moral Comedy* (Evanston, Ill., 1971) and *Shakespeare and the Late Moral Plays* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1986), ingeniously explicate this pervasive influence. By the time of Jonson’s *The Devil is an Ass* (1616), parody has robbed the genre of its power.

A Mirror for Magistrates (1559), collaborated with Thomas Norton to adapt this admonitory genre for the stage in *Gorboduc* (1562), the earliest surviving tragedy in English. Sir Philip Sidney, condemning English drama in his 'Defence of Poetry', was willing to exempt *Gorboduc* on the grounds of its 'stately speeches' and 'notable morality'. Stiff and schematic as the play may be, it does manage to reconcile its classical-scholarly origins with current concerns about the unsettled Elizabethan succession – a type of combination crucial to the greater works that followed. Some early plays were a direct outgrowth of humanistic education, and the so-called University Wits included many of the great founders of Elizabethan drama: Greene, Lyly, Peele, Lodge, Marlowe. Mere story-telling (as in the naïve chronicle plays) became artistically complex with the introduction of sub-plots that resonate themes from the central story.¹⁷ Contrary to traditional precepts (and much to the dismay of Sidney and other Renaissance literary critics), the sub-plots in tragedies were often farcically comic, even in as grand a classical story as *Horestes* (1567), or as lurid a story of tyrannical violence as Preston's *Cambises* (1558–69). The early Tudor tragedies generally strike modern audiences as dull or crude or both, often labouring along in the verse form known as 'fourteeners' (for the number of syllables per line), with predictable didactic morals and psychologically unbelievable characters. *The Battle of Alcazar* (1589) is chaotic and bombastic; *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (1588) merely stultifying; *Gismond of Salerne* (1566–8) has all the inevitable incongruities of a Boccaccio story told in a Senecan mode.

The breakthrough to greatness may be located in Thomas Kyd's rich and vivid *Spanish Tragedy* (1582–92), and in the several triumphs of Christopher Marlowe, whose tragedies have the kind of raw power that often characterizes artifacts from young cultures discovering their strength. Marlowe's radical mind and poetic ear made a 'mighty line' out of blank verse and put its full power in the hands of overreaching heroes who conveyed the simultaneous grandeur and cynicism of this brave new Elizabethan world and its unbridled colonial appetites. With astonishing energy, he liberated English drama from the complacencies of both its academic and its popular conventions. As learned and popular drama commingled, the upper and lower classes became jointly invested in theatre. The despised and fugitive

¹⁷ For example, see William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935), pp. 48–52, on the interplay between the main plot and the sub-plot of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*. Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot*, discusses the development of this dramatic technique, though his *New Readings vs. Old Plays* (Chicago, 1979) warns that the ingenuity of critics in finding correlations sometimes borders on fraud. More broadly, current critical theory mistrusts the entire practice of 'thematizing' literature, of mistaking an artwork for a coherent and objectively identifiable argument.

trade of player became increasingly respectable; its noble patronage became more than a technical defence against vagabondage laws. Popular theatres, mostly on the outskirts of London, provided an outlet for the new ideas and boisterous energies of the era.

By the turn of the century, however (the story goes), the fires of Elizabethan optimism had largely burnt out, and tragedy sadly poked the glowing ashes. The genre distinctions failed in new ways, as comedy sagged under the weight of social problems and tragedy savoured gallows humour. Coterie theatres – a haven for the old academic strain of drama – provided an outlet for a third genre, satire, when it was banned in printed form in 1599. Their use of child actors helped heighten the functions of social satire and literary parody, since exalted rant and profound lust in the mouths of babes brought pretentiousness and theatrical self-consciousness to the fore. These strategic exaggerations affected the competing adult theatres long after the fad for boys' companies had faded.¹⁸ The senescence of Elizabeth may have encouraged an increasingly cynical attitude towards women (complicated by the reliance on all-male casts), and with it a sense of cultural decadence, though the tragedies were generally set in foreign countries to reduce the very real danger of offending the English court. Some dramatists could be justly accused of pandering to the gender prejudices and social *malaise* of the audience, even to its sadism. Before condemning the famous mayhem of Elizabethan tragedy as pathological, however, one must recall that violence has always been a selling point in commercial entertainments, and that Elizabethans were (necessarily) considerably less squeamish than modern Englishmen about many aspects of the human body, not just its violent abuse.

Broad representations of royal politics and warfare steadily gave way to domestic tragedies, heavily moralized stories about unruly passions destroying ordinary families. This sub-genre (which probably derived from popular ballads about actual domestic crimes) began with the anonymous *Arden of Faversham* (1585–92), a grimly realistic play loosely based on a contemporary case of husband-killing, and after a short eclipse reappeared in *A Warning for Fair Women* (c. 1599). The prolific Thomas Heywood liberated domestic tragedy from reliance on local events and spousal cruelty with *A Woman Killed with Kindness* (1603), in which Frankford treats his wife Anne so nobly after she betrays him that she dies of remorse. Domestic tragedy was also a favoured string in the equally versatile bow of Thomas Middleton; *Women Beware Women* (1623) demonstrates that playwright's talent for

¹⁸ R. A. Foakes, 'Tragedy at the children's theatres after 1600' in David Galloway, ed., *Elizabethan Theatre II* (Toronto, 1970), pp. 37–59.

penetrating moral realism, and indicates the way domestic tragedy brought psychological issues and female protagonists to the fore in the Jacobean period.

Various dramatists, while all riding the crest of tragedy as a rediscovered genre, moved through the medium with their own characteristic strokes. Even Shakespeare, whose triumphs may seem 'not of an age / But for all time', nevertheless followed a cycle of Elizabethan comic optimism about the promise of new life and Jacobean tragic pessimism with its nihilistic overtones, modulating finally into the tragicomic escapism of the romances. In telling the stories of Bussy, Byron, and Chabot, George Chapman applied his classical learning to recent French court history, turning studies of decaying social orders into rhetorically difficult tragedies of ideas. Ben Jonson's more pedantic classicism, mired in historical facts and footnotes, rendered *Sejanus* (1603) and *Catiline* (1611) emotionally stillborn. Cyril Tourneur's mode was ironic and macabre, though his *Atheist's Tragedy* (1611) contrives an orthodox moral conclusion. In plays such as *Antonio's Revenge* (1600), the up-market satirist John Marston indulged in wild generic mixtures and wild 'fustian' vocabulary.

The various authors worked infinite variations on stock tragic figures such as the revenger (probably an expression of popular nostalgia for the private retribution abrogated by the centralized Elizabethan legal system, and of ambivalence about Christian doctrines demanding passivity to injuries), the malcontent (probably a reaction to the late-Renaissance epidemic of melancholy among frustrated courtiers), and the Machiavel (probably a reflection of the terror of a society changing from a traditional system of class and honour to a hierarchy of money and the rules of commercial competition). It is tempting to correlate the decline of Renaissance tragedy with the ironic conversion of these stock figures into self-conscious stereotypes, but in fact such metadramatic ironies were already common in the time of Elizabeth. Heroic tragedy may have become outdated for a sophisticated audience, and revenge tragedy may have exhausted its conventions through sheer repetition, but there is no clear reason why the emergent tragedy of sexuality could not carry an equivalent power. Something else seems to have happened to sap the strength of the genre.

As dramatists wrote for increasingly exclusive audiences (at indoor theatres or court masques), the habit of realism deteriorated. As London became a more cynical city, the idealistic element could no longer keep company with plain observation. The alternative to the destructive *Realpolitik* that had replaced the jingoistic attitudes of chronicle, and to the sexual decadence that had replaced romantic love, was pastoral escapism: the slick professionals Beaumont and Fletcher, though they continued both

the domestic and political strains of tragedy with some success in *The Maid's Tragedy* (1608–11) and *A King and no King* (1611), showed little appetite for searching moral questions. They were most important for leading a commercially successful effort to show tragic dilemmas (with the excessively elaborate plot and language now displaced into rustic and courtly tenors) miraculously undone in the genre known as tragicomedy or romance.

The dark alternative is visible in John Webster's episodic dramaturgy, which showed a grand, brittle world and its no less grand and brittle inhabitants doomed to meaningless suffering and annihilation. His and Middleton's tragedies constitute a magnificent final expression of the cultural explosion that would merely echo in the decadence of Caroline tragedians such as John Ford, who aggrandized twisted passions (as in *The Broken Heart*, 1629, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, 1632), but with a kind of resignation. There remain the chilly, dispirited tragedies of Massinger and the versatile, businesslike work of James Shirley (as in *The Cardinal*, 1641, an unsatisfactory echo of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, 1614), but the prodigious energy and sense of new possibilities that were so clear in Marlowe seem already to have been exhausted. Perhaps the English Civil War demonstrated that some cultural contradictions had proved impossible to negotiate by less violent communal rituals such as tragic theatre. Perhaps the decay of tragedy signalled that such crucial negotiations had moved onto other stages.

This provisional history of tragedy thus ends where the preceding theory began, with the recognition that drama is part of an elaborate and valuable mechanism for adjudicating cultural dissonances. The theatres were closed in 1642 by a fanatical puritan Parliament that declared its repugnance towards both the concept and the excesses of drama, then staged a ceremonious public deposition and decapitation of the King¹⁹ – a contradiction less horrible but no less obvious than the accompanying slaughter of sisters and brothers over the true Christian way to save their souls. In the aftermath of the Civil War, even the same old tragedies were bound to look different. Old Hamlet's ghost demanding that his son avenge his death would have meant something new when the play was revived in 1661, as Charles II set about executing his father's killers.²⁰ Indeed, the emphasis in revenge tragedy (as in other artistic forms) increasingly fell on overtly political allegories after the Restoration, with only vestigial gestures towards metaphysics.

¹⁹ Franco Moretti, "A huge eclipse": tragic form and the deconsecration of sovereignty' in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance* (Norman, Okla., 1982), pp. 7–8, suggests that tragedy helped create a receptive audience for these acts.

²⁰ Nancy Klein Maguire, *Regicide and Restoration* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 121; cited in John Kerrigan, *On Shakespeare and Early Modern Literature: Essays* (Oxford, 2001), p. 237.

Under the providential model so vivid in Protestant polemics, revenge was often God's moral instrument, whether punishing the human race for the Fall, a nation for its false doctrine and moral laxity, or an individual for particular sins. But, as a rationalist system of deterrence and rehabilitation gradually replaced this model of punishment, the energies of revenge tragedy were inevitably muted, or at least transmuted.²¹

The tragedy that returned to the stage with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 was formal even in its passions and violations; the so-called 'heroic drama' celebrated extremes of love and honour in a declamatory style, with more loyalty to literary conventions and political allusions than to realistic psychology. For all its polish, Restoration tragedy thus reverted to some of the characteristics of *Gorboduc*. The novel, which similarly exploits informality, indeterminacy, and interiority,²² would eventually assume some of the functions of great Renaissance tragedy, but by the middle of the seventeenth century the remarkable ride in the tragic vehicle had come, full circle, to an end.

Brief readings of six major tragedies follow. Without claiming to be definitive or more than loosely interconnected, these readings may suggest the usefulness of the preceding theoretical and historical paradigms. This selection of canonical works is divided into two sections. *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy* belong to a distinct sub-genre called revenge tragedy – a phenomenon with deep roots in both social and literary history. The other three engage a philosophical theme called theodicy – the enquiry into the nature of evil and the means by which it enters Creation. The availability of tragic dilemmas must itself have been troubling to a culture committed to the idea that the world had been made by a unitary, infallible, and benevolent God. Superficial discord could be blamed on the Fall, but the classical model of an innocent hero caught in a conflict among gods, or between the state and the gods, would have been profoundly threatening to a monotheistic culture that defended state authority as a natural extension of divine will. In *Doctor Faustus*, the diabolical enters the world through the pride of a single man, whose demise exposes the hazards of his aspiring culture. In *Othello*, the diabolical villain comes to represent the endlessly contagious evils of envy and self-consciousness that can subvert even an ideal

²¹ Kerrigan, *On Shakespeare*, pp. 230–54, cogently articulates this afterlife of Renaissance revenge tragedy.

²² Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Epic and novel' in his *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin, Tex., 1981), attributes the emergence of the novel as the essential modern genre to its ability to encompass 'heteroglossia', an indeterminate juxtaposition of conflicting attitudes and levels of speech.

civilization. *The Duchess of Malfi* presents evil as the natural by-product of the decadence, the social entropy, that one heroic woman resists to the limits of her mortality.

Each section begins with one of the earliest and greatest public-theatre tragedies; they may actually have been composed in the same room, since Kyd, under torture, testified that the atheistic papers found in his possession belonged to his room-mate Marlowe; within a few years of writing these masterpieces, both young men were dead. The second play in each group is by Shakespeare, who characteristically converts the generic conventions into indeterminate parables about the fundamental problems of revenge and evil; if *Hamlet* compels its audience into an uncanny identification with the tragic hero, *Othello* compels an uneasy association with the villain. The third in each group, by men about whom we know very little but their writings, reflects the macabre excess and the satiric self-consciousness typical of mid-Jacobean tragedy. Within each group, the plays are separated by intervals of about a decade, marking something like the youth, maturity, and senescence of Renaissance tragedy; altogether the selection covers the great quarter-century of the genre.

Three tragedies of revenge: *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*

Revenge tragedy diverges from its master genre in that the protagonist is usually in his miserable quandary from the beginning, so he neither falls from prosperity (the medieval *de casibus* model) nor makes a fatal error (the Aristotelian *hamartia* model).²³ When critics seek out the moral of revenge tragedies (and most do), they must look elsewhere, and the primary question is almost always whether the revenger ought rather to have left it to God to enforce justice, as Christian orthodoxy instructed: vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. English literature thus continues its seemingly life-long task of reconciling Christian heroism with an ancient legacy of tribal codes and instinctive behaviours. The contradiction certainly seems sufficient to generate Hegelian tragic dilemmas for the protagonist. Yet the oxymoronic quality of Christian revenge rarely proves to be the core of such plays; even where ethical debate becomes prominent, as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1599–1601) or Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (1610–12), the morality of revenge receives less consideration than mortality, Stoicism, and epistemology. The vengeful ghost inherited from Seneca is steadily exorcised, and God

²³ Helen Gardner, *The Business of Criticism* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 41–2, observes these divergences.

rarely intervenes to take its place. The world of revenge tragedy is primarily a human world, and the bloody rule is to do unto others as you have been done to.

The reason playwrights neglect the ethical conflict may be quite simple: audiences in Renaissance theatres, like those in modern cinemas, probably enjoyed identifying with a hero whose bitter wrongs are, after a long delay, violently and ingeniously repaid. It seems to be a basic human fantasy, a balm to the helpless indignation most people regularly feel from early childhood onwards; and Elizabethan audiences would presumably have been no more ready than modern ones to forgive the sneering villains. Most action movies of recent decades have wooed audiences with this formula, including a portrait of the legal system as merely another infuriating obstacle between the revenger and true justice. Again, given the striking continuities, it seems pointless to defamiliarize the Renaissance experience by attributing the formula entirely to the particularities of Elizabethan theatrical convention and government policy.

This is not to deny that such conventions and policies helped shape the genre. The efficient cause for the prevalence of revenge plots in English tragedy is the example of Seneca, both directly and through the mediation of *The Spanish Tragedy*. Many of the ironies of subsequent plays become illegible unless we recognize the conventions they are exploiting. Furthermore, this Senecan model could hardly have proliferated so rapidly unless there were tensions in Elizabethan society to which it answered. Duels of honour would become a serious problem among the Jacobean aristocracy, but they are probably a secondary manifestation of a more basic shift that was already troubling the Elizabethan populace. The explosion of litigation in Tudor courts suggests how many impulses towards private revenge the system was struggling to accommodate through public channels. Local justice, based in the competing interests of families, was rapidly giving way to a centralized legal bureaucracy in which personal passions and honour counted for little, and patronage and lawyerly rhetoric became all-important. Little wonder that the revenger is usually a powerless outsider avenging an inflammatory offence to a lover or close kin; little wonder, too, that such stories still have such overwhelming appeal.

Furthermore, for a society increasingly fearful of death as absolute annihilation, there would have been a supplementary pleasure in the suggestion implicit throughout the stories of blood-revenge, as in many tribal cultures, that death is a contingent and unnatural event that can somehow be corrected by punishing the fatal agent. Mortality becomes conveniently externalized and localized in a villain, a villain both morally and practically more assailable than nature itself. Revenge tragedy offers a figurative way of

saying (with Donne), 'Death, thou shalt die' – a fantasy that cures the passivity and futility of mourning. If René Girard is correct that human societies are perpetually threatened by a potentially endless cycle of blood-revenge, and that theatre (as well as law) exists largely as a ritual circuit-breaker for that dangerous social malfunction,²⁴ it is also true that this notion of universal murder helps to conceal the inevitability of death. Revenge tragedy relocates mortality within the realm of human volition, sometimes even disguises it in the black robes of justice. The nostalgia for personal retribution in an increasingly impersonal system of justice may have reflected also a heightened concern about the fate of individual consciousness in what was increasingly recognized as the apathetic, intolerant machinery of biological nature. The individual will, finding itself increasingly excluded from the construction of an order of justice, finds itself similarly irrelevant to the order of nature. Many terrible crimes are committed in *King Lear* (1605–6), but are any finally more disturbing than the simple biological fact that Cordelia is 'dead as earth' and will 'come no more. Never, never, never, never, never' (5.3.235)? Neither the audience nor Lear himself can find any consolation, because they can conceive no revenge, when the true enemy is revealed as indifferent mortal nature: 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, and thou no breath at all?' (5.3.281–2).

Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies are probably most memorable for their macabre elements: the vivid sadism of the elaborate killings, and the abuses of severed body parts such as Hieronimo's tongue in *The Spanish Tragedy*, Alonzo's finger in Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622), the detached hand and leg in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Annabella's heart in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's A Whore*. Even Shakespeare, to whom we tend to attribute the high dignity conferred by the relentless approval of cultural authorities, spices *Titus Andronicus* (1593) with a variety of severed hands as well as a rape-victim's severed tongue, leading to the serving of human bodies as a pasty for their mother. In these great plays, and many other lesser ones, the dance of death becomes the work of autopsy; the ritual theatre of blood enters the scientific anatomy theatre.

The lurid excesses of revenge tragedy are not hard to explain. If Renaissance playwrights mistook Senecan closet drama for stage drama, they might have felt emboldened to show horrors that were originally intended only to energize the rhetoric.²⁵ If Renaissance playhouses were analogous to modern

²⁴ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, 1977).

²⁵ See the reconsideration of this traditional idea in Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition* (New Haven, Conn., 1985).

cinemas, then we can recognize a common appetite for increasingly explicit gruesomeness in popular entertainments, particularly given the popularity of mutilations as public judicial events in the Renaissance. Playwrights were writing for the immediate commercial needs of their theatres, not for the approval of some future refined academic reader, and competition among companies for spectators (as well as the jading of those spectators) would naturally have led to an escalation of horrors. A glance through the plots of Renaissance tragedy confirms that the genre, competing as it did with adjacent entertainments such as prostitution and bear-baiting, concerned itself as much with the marketing principles of the shock-tabloids as with the artistic principles of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

It would be wrong, however, to dismiss these plays as misguided or trivial works merely because of their sensationalism; there is a necessary genius behind the misprision and exploitation of Senecan violence. Murder and incest are sensational precisely because they are important; they are primal violations of human bodies and of the social order established to protect them. If we feel a guilty, voyeuristic pleasure in watching these events, it is partly the Freudian relief of confronting the forbidden, here safely encased within the frame of artistic ritual and convention. Characters such as Oedipus and Macbeth remain the most vivid in the public mind, not because they are the worst or best of people, but on the contrary because they are Every-men whose circumstances provoke them into violating the most basic rules civilization has constructed. Revengers are specialists in the tragic contradiction of shattering the most fundamental rules of civil behaviour on behalf of fundamental justice.

The Spanish Tragedy

No play in this period is more important historically than Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, which established many of the themes, plot-lines, and atmospheric traits that the great subsequent tragedies have in common. The play was frequently reprinted and revived (once with new passages by Ben Jonson, commissioned by the enterprising producer Philip Henslowe), and the numerous contemporary parodies affirm its prominence. The chief characteristics of Renaissance tragedy are all abundantly on display here: the metatheatrical self-consciousness, the extreme ritualized violence, the black humour and the blacker mourning, the variety of stage business, the mixture of elegant and passion-torn speech, the concern with court corruption, and the centrality of furtive and finally excessive revenge to the plot. *The Spanish Tragedy* also shares with many of its great descendants – Shakespeare's

Romeo and Juliet (1595), Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, Marston's *Sophonisba* (1605), Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, and Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Broken Heart* – a particular version of the tragic conflict between individual desire and powerful impersonal mechanisms: the disastrous insistence that a woman subordinate her marital preference to the interests of a greedy and tradition-bound patriarchal society. The demands of dynastic marriage override true affection as well as true justice.

The historical importance of *The Spanish Tragedy* is inseparable from the astonishing plenitude of the play in its own right: a richness of plot, character, symbol, spectacle, and rhetoric. Kyd gave his audience its money's worth. The story is framed by the observations of Revenge and the Ghost of Don Andrea, who together oversee the disasters that follow from Andrea's death in battle at the hands of Balthazar, Prince of Portugal. Andrea's friend Horatio vies with the Spanish nobleman Lorenzo for the credit of capturing Balthazar, a rivalry that becomes more complicated when both Horatio and Balthazar become enamoured of Lorenzo's sister, Bel-imperia. Lorenzo, hoping for social advancement, and the Spanish king, hoping for geopolitical advantage, both favour the match with Balthazar. Bel-imperia, however, loves Horatio, and meets him in secret. Not secret enough, though: Lorenzo and Balthazar interrupt the tryst, imprison Bel-imperia, and stab and hang Horatio. Horatio's father Hieronimo finds the body and goes mad, but recovers enough control to plot revenge. Frustrated in his attempts to reach the king directly with his complaint, Hieronimo (who has been reading Seneca) apparently lets himself be humoured with the privilege of staging a play for the combined royal courts of the two countries. His play, rich in correspondences to the aforementioned events, is acted (like a court masque) by the aristocrats themselves, and under the guise of play-acting, Hieronimo stabs Lorenzo while Bel-imperia stabs Balthazar. Hieronimo's subsequent suicide attempt is foiled, but he bites off his tongue to prevent any confession, and when he is ordered to confess in writing, he uses a knife (provided to sharpen his pen) to kill Lorenzo's father and finally himself. The play ends with Andrea's Ghost gleefully planning perpetual joys for his dead friends and an 'endless tragedy' for his dead enemies.

In telling this lurid and intricate tale, Kyd rediscovered the potential of tragedy for representing life in its beautiful and destructive complexity, rather than as a vessel for preconceived and predictable moral lessons. The burgeoning cultural conflicts of the Renaissance clamoured to be represented and adjudicated, and from the opening words of the play we find ourselves at contested boundaries:

Tragedy

When this eternal substance of my soul
Did live imprison'd in my wanton flesh,
Each in their function serving other's need,
I was a courtier in the Spanish court.
My name was Don Andrea, my descent,
Though not ignoble, yet inferior far
To gracious fortunes of my tender youth:
For there in prime and pride of all my years,
By duteous service and deserving love,
In secret I possess'd a worthy dame,
Which hight sweet Bel-imperia by name.
But in the harvest of my summer joys
Death's winter nipp'd the blossoms of my bliss,
Forcing divorce betwixt my love and me.
For in the late conflict with Portingale
My valour drew me into danger's mouth,
Till life to death made passage through my wounds.

The Ghost of Don Andrea, himself a liminal creature compromising the boundary between life and death, thus ushers us into the play – and ushers in the great age of Elizabethan tragedy. These first seventeen lines, laden with paradoxes and reciprocities, discuss the conflicts between mind and body and between hereditary and achieved nobility (both very lively Renaissance disputes), and sketch a story of secret love against bitter death (a favourite Renaissance polarity which will constantly tangle the kissing of Horatio and Bel-imperia in motives and metaphors of killing).²⁶ Death itself came at a liminal point, since the battle occurred 'where Spain and Portingale do jointly knit / Their frontiers, leaning on each other's bound' (1.2.22–3). In the remainder of this opening soliloquy, continuing to mix the familiar with the exotic, Kyd draws into his tale of modern Spain (a place of considerable interest to the Elizabethans) the powerful precedents of classical literature, as Andrea narrates his death in battle (which recalls that of Achilles), his stranding on the banks of the River Styx, and his liberation by Don Horatio, who (like Antigone) performs the neglected burial. Andrea then must walk a spiritual tightrope between a sort of hell and a sort of heaven, overseen by the *discordia concors* of Pluto and Proserpine, who represent the primal oppositions evoked by those seventeen lines: war and love, death and life, winter and summer.

As the play proper begins, the King of Spain attempts three related reconciliations: his country with Portugal, power with justice, and Lorenzo with Horatio. The tragedy will occur precisely because it is impossible to reconcile

²⁶ See for example 1.4.60–8, 2.2.21–40, and 2.4.32–49.

such oppositions in a fallen world – a world not only of money, politics, and betrayal, but also of scarcity, where there is only one royal Balthazar to be claimed as prisoner, only one beautiful Bel-imperia to be married, and only one mortal Horatio to carry all of Hieronimo's paternal hopes. The events that follow quickly sketch a test between love and friendship, and again between love and war, all presented simultaneously as psychologically realistic stories and as grand mythological confrontations. There is a powerful critique of lawlessness within a no less powerful critique of government, and every attempt at justice becomes self-contradictory.²⁷ War becomes a place of amity, peace of treacherous bloodshed. This flood of unresolved oppositions might be dismissed as artistic carelessness rather than artistic genius, but nearly all the great Elizabethan tragedies display a reckless delight in inclusiveness, an appetite for multiplying complexities. The very lack of an authorized tradition in the genre comparable to those long established in poetry may have allowed tragedy a freedom that made it adaptable to the new energies of Renaissance culture, which was itself an overflow of countless divergent influences. *The Spanish Tragedy* can be located at the perfect Nietzschean axis for tragedy, with the chilly Apollonian courtliness in constant tension with the Dionysian passions and horrors – a tension sustained right through the astonishing last scene, in which Hieronimo's brutal revenge takes place within the high-cultural rituals of a theatrical performance at court. Metaphors become grimly literalized, and high aspirations dragged down by the body, as when Lorenzo cruelly mocks the hanging Horatio with the observation that 'Although his life were still ambitious proud, / Yet is he at the highest now he is dead' (2.4.60–1). No play could articulate more clearly, in its texture and its plot, its genesis from a multi-culture struggling to resolve the many paradoxes in its evolving view of the universe.

The most memorable figure in *The Spanish Tragedy* is Hieronimo, father of the heroic victim Horatio. Though he is not established early as a protagonist – Kyd is too busy weaving the plot – Hieronimo becomes the emotional centre of the story. His nobly unified roles – as a man of love and of justice, of art and of law, as a husband and a father, a servant of family and of king – all become contradictions through his son's murder. Hieronimo thus wanders into a play-world thematically charged with paradox, and we are able to watch its effect on a sentient and eloquent creature. His predominant passion is mourning, and his predominant mode is madness: he is overwhelmed by the completeness, injustice, and irreversibility of his son's annihilation in death. Amid all the whirling of the plot, Hieronimo's speeches

²⁷ Hunter, *Dramatic Identities*, pp. 214–29, identifies 'ironies of justice' as thematically central to *The Spanish Tragedy*.

keep returning us to the plain truth at the core of the tragedy: the fact of death and the futility of trying to change or transcend it through love, honour, art, progeny, or justice. (The paganistic frame allows Kyd to leave the viability of religious redemption, along with the problem of Christian revenge, tactfully unexamined.) This thematic focus, more deeply than the many shared points of plot and style, is what *The Spanish Tragedy* bequeaths to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*; it is also a distinctive concern of Renaissance culture, as the facts of error and mutability erased each mortal dreamer of glory.

Under the circumstances, revenging well seemed the best revenge. The performance of that revenge by a theatrical ritual in *The Spanish Tragedy* – a motif that recurs in *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* – may constitute an acknowledgment that such satisfactions are allowable and feasible only within a frame of fantasy. At an aesthetic distance, the massacre becomes an elaborate sacrifice which may serve to exorcise the demons of helpless frustration at perceived injustice, demons so common in the human animal, so heightened in the aspiring minds of the Renaissance, so focused in the fierce economies of Elizabethan England and Elizabeth's court. Hieronimo drops his metadramatic role to tell the assembled royalty,

Haply you think, but bootless are your thoughts,
That this is fabulously counterfeit,
And that we do as all tragedians do:
To die today, for fashioning our scene,
The death of Ajax, or some Roman peer,
And in a minute starting up again,
Revive to please tomorrow's audience.
No, princes, know I am Hieronimo,
The hopeless father of a hapless son.

(4.4.76–84)

And here he shows the unreviving body of Horatio, for which he has repaid these fathers in kind. By having Hieronimo negate the fictionality of his show in this way, Kyd removes one crucial level of detachment between his spectators and his play. Drama is not some academic historical exercise, the author-figure here reminds his audience; it is about real and present lives, and therefore about real and imminent deaths. Countless Elizabethans, bereaved by war, poverty, or religious persecution, could have conceived a complaint similar to Hieronimo's against their monarch; *The Spanish Tragedy* allowed them to witness and approve an almost inconceivable treason that follows naturally, by the logic of revenge, from that complaint.

Hamlet

To locate an intrinsic meaning in *Hamlet* is to defy augury, as well as critical fashion. This play has been subjected to the most intensive hermeneutic scrutiny of any work in Western culture, except perhaps those believed to be dictated by God. Yet the critical community still does not concur on whether the motivating ghost is angel or devil, whether Hamlet does or does not, should or should not, act promptly, or even what the most famous line of the play ('To be or not to be') really means. Nor can editors agree what the central word is in the second most famous soliloquy ('O that this too too sallied/sullied/solid flesh would melt'), or whether another famous soliloquy ('How all occasions do inform against me') even belongs in the text. This may reflect the critical industry's instinct for self-perpetuation, or the inevitable indeterminacy of any text read closely enough, but it certainly ought to make a conscientious coward out of anyone tempted to say what this play means.

Hamlet is therefore an embarrassing play for a scholar to write about, as 'To be or not to be' is an embarrassing line for an actor to speak. It is partly an embarrassment of riches, but partly also a recognition that it has been done so often before, done so well and done so badly. Moreover, this most famous of plays is particularly renowned for its infinite interpretability, for the way it (like the 'Mousetrap' Hamlet himself stages) causes its viewers to project themselves into the play. In this sense, *Hamlet* is less a tragedy than a frame and a stimulus for the creation of tragedies, infinitely various personal refractions of an archetypal story. Shakespeare uses an array of standard Renaissance tragic conflicts – mortality against ambition, Christianity against revenge, love against sexual horror, private truth against political imperatives – to compel a deep, sympathetic recognition of the way cultural contradictions agonize the sensitive individual. Observers who perceive the play as fundamentally concerned with their own crises may appear absurdly egoistical, but in a sense they are properly employing this tragedy-making machine.

Shakespeare biographers read *Hamlet* as Shakespeare's metaphorical autobiography, the story of a brilliant young man who liked to stage revealing plays and was doomed to be understood and admired only in the future retelling of his stories; the legend that Shakespeare himself played the Ghost of Hamlet's father corresponds suggestively to the fact that Shakespeare had a son named Hamnet who died young. Theatre historians insist that the play cannot be understood properly without viewing it as an artifact of the historical theatre (as a revenge tragedy largely borrowed from Kyd), and radical modern directors claim that its essential truths are best revealed by radically modernizing its setting. When the great actress Sarah Bernhardt

played Hamlet, she told interviewers that Hamlet was, after all, predominantly feminine.²⁸ *Hamlet* now strikes me as a play about information systems and virtual realities. The two most famous interpretations of *Hamlet* follow this reflexive pattern: melancholic intellectuals have described the play as a study of intellectual melancholy, and psychoanalytic critics have characterized the play as prescient psychoanalysis. Both interpretations are built around an interpretive crux as stubborn as that of Iago's motivation: Hamlet's delay in avenging his father.²⁹ Delays while the protagonist plots his elaborate revenge are quite conventional in Elizabethan tragedy, but that does not preclude interpreting Hamlet's delay as psychological evidence, since Shakespeare characteristically provokes conventions to express deep questions or truths.

Nearly two hundred years ago, several deep thinkers, oppressed by the brutal actions of the French and Industrial Revolutions, described Hamlet as a deep thinker trapped in a world of brutal action. Romantic poet-philosophers in Germany and England – Goethe and Schlegel, Coleridge and Hazlitt³⁰ – discerned a romantic poet-philosopher named Hamlet, drawing their keynote from the end of the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action. (3.1.82–7)

How can anyone become a decisive executioner, this interpretation asks, in a world so lacking in absolute truth and moral purity that 'There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so . . . Use every man after his deserts and who should 'scape whipping? . . . I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me' (2.2.249–50, 529–30; 3.1.121–3)? Hamlet's intelligence makes him cripplingly aware of the good and bad pertaining to any action, and so

²⁸ See for example *Poet Lore* 4, New Series (1900), 149.

²⁹ Eleanor Prosser in *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford, Calif., 1967) offers another perspective on this crux; taking seriously the paradox of Christian revenge, she argues provocatively that an Elizabethan audience would have recognized the Ghost as diabolical and that Hamlet's fatal mistake was his failure to delay further.

³⁰ These mighty opposites both recognized themselves in this hero: the conservative Coleridge remarked that 'I have a smack of Hamlet myself', and the liberal Hazlitt commented, 'It is *we* who are Hamlet.' See the 24 June 1827 entry in T. Ashe, ed., *The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1905), p. 47; and *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt* (London, 1902), 1.232.

he accomplishes nothing until he yields the decisions to a Higher Intelligence: 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will', he tells Horatio (5.2.10–11), and later, 'There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow' (5.2.219–20).

Contemplation reveals action to be not only impossible to justify immediately, but also eventually futile. Hamlet's royal father was effectively forgotten after a few months by his own wife; and, as Hamlet observes in the graveyard, neither the lovely cosmetics of the lady nor the clever ploys of the lawyer have kept them from becoming rotting skulls. Indeed, imagination can 'trace the noble dust of Alexander till 'a find it stopping a bung-hole' (5.1.203–4). The head emptied of its brains raises the same unanswerable questions that the head too full of brains raised. It is not surprising that Hamlet contemplating the skull of Yorick is this play's best-known image: the entire play may be aptly described as a skull set on stage confronting the audience with facts that render absurd our choices and efforts. Death, the great 'common' equalizer, mocks Hamlet's aspirations (and not only Hamlet's); only at the end does he recognize that the imminence of death can provoke action rather than dissuade from it.

A century after the Romantics, a new movement (again emerging from the Austro-German intellectual community) claimed *Hamlet* for itself. Psychoanalytic critics (beginning with Ernest Jones) interpreted Hamlet's delay as a psychoanalytic symptom. Hamlet cannot kill Claudius because Claudius, having killed Hamlet's father and married Hamlet's mother, is too deeply identified with Hamlet's own Oedipal impulses. This explains Hamlet's focus on the incestuous aspect of the violation, and explains also his sudden self-loathing and misogyny (the influence of this theory upon Laurence Olivier's film version of the play is unmistakable).³¹ Thus, *Hamlet* has been simultaneously puzzling and compelling for so long because it draws on the darkest and most essential secret underlying all human behaviour. Like Oedipus, we all attack the riddle eagerly, and find the answer is ourselves; like him, we have chosen to be blind at the core of our insight. The play provokes subconscious recognitions; if dramatic characters are not really living people with full psychological histories, audiences still are, and *Hamlet* is an instrument of group psychotherapy, a tragedy designed to exorcise the demons of the nuclear family.

The only way to nail this protean spectre down to a few solid interpretive foundations is to enquire about the things *Hamlet* might have meant, or at

³¹ Dale Silviria, *Laurence Olivier and the Art of Film Making* (London, 1985), pp. 171, 174. Most film adaptations intensely sexualize the bedroom scene between Hamlet and Gertrude.

least meant differently, to an Elizabethan audience, with its indoctrinations about revenge tragedy, incest, kingship, suicide, and mortality.³² On the other hand, it seems foolish and pointless to dispel the peculiar magic of this play by refusing to acknowledge its suggestiveness as commentary on so many lives in so many eras. There are moments of seemingly timeless penetration, when the particular story of this Danish prince gestures towards universality. When Hamlet discovers that the gravedigger began work on the very day of Hamlet's birth and his father's great victory, the play acquires the archetypal power of tragic fate, the uncanny navigation to a predestined place of doom.

Shakespeare draws on another archetype by suggesting that the world has become 'an unweeded garden' of evil and mortality ever since the 'serpent' Claudius poisoned old Hamlet in his 'orchard'. *Hamlet* thus takes place during the awkward extended adolescence of the human world as well as of its hero. Eden has given way to a place that will err and decay until the purifying apocalyptic ending; the radiant world perceived in childhood has become infected with repellent hypocrisy and lust, answerable only with violence. In this sense, the plot of *Hamlet* is an elaborate vindication of cynical adolescence, which is itself a period of painful contradictions requiring tragic explication: the former great father really has been usurped by a weak, conniving, lascivious figure who turns the sainted mother into an epitome of corrupt sexuality, while stupidity and self-interest really have made love transient and friendship treacherous. Shakespearian tragedy never merely tells a sad story. The stories are always symbolic systems that allow us to re-experience and redefine the crises in the making of our own identities; the plays do also for the individual what I have suggested tragedy characteristically does for the culture as a whole.

Like Holbein's famous painting of *The Ambassadors*, *Hamlet* is a perfect two-faced Janus for the Renaissance, balanced as the culture was between the aspiring rediscovery of selfhood and the material world, and the cautionary heritage of medieval Christianity. One face of *Hamlet* is 'the mirror up to nature' Hamlet himself recommends for drama, a 'counterfeit presentment' of living families and kings, inspiring renewed awe and affection for the human mind and its voices. The other face is the anonymous skull Christianity has insistently urged people to contemplate, a *memento mori* that inspired *contemptus mundi*, a reminder of death that would teach people to emphasize spiritual salvation over transient worldly pride and pleasures. The conflict between heroic fantasies and mortal abjection was heightened in the Renaissance, but it was far from new then, and could hardly be called

³² Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet* (Princeton, N.J., 1984), and Arthur McGee, *The Elizabethan Hamlet* (New Haven, Conn., 1987), are good sources for such an enquiry.

outdated now. Spectators at a production of *Hamlet* are looking simultaneously at a mirror and at a skull, and they are seeing themselves. They recognize in Hamlet versions of their own ideas and their own life-narratives, then must share his graveyard recognitions, as they must his graveyard destiny. When the audience is compelled to reconcile the two images, to see itself as both 'the wonder of the world' and 'this quintessence of dust', the juxtaposition generates the tragic effect in an extraordinarily pure form.

Perhaps, as T. S. Eliot's Prufrock says, we are not Prince Hamlet. Certainly we are not medieval Danish princes commanded by ghosts to murder our royal uncles. But we enter the stage of 'this distracted globe' born to a role and its 'cursed spite' (1.5.97, 188). We can hardly help seeing ancestors in the 'mind's eye', sensing a possessive spirit of heredity that tells us what class status, what mental and physical abilities and abnormalities, what ancient grudges, will shape our ends, rough-hew them how we will. As children of Adam and Eve, we live out the fatal legacy of our parents' crimes; as children of Israelis or Palestinians, as Sunnis or Shiites, we (like Fortinbras and his troops) kill and die on behalf of fruitless ancestral feuds, meaningless cycles of fear and vengeance, compelled by the ghosts of our fathers in armour. As *The Spanish Tragedy* suggests, such ghosts exact a terrible price from the world of the living: is there any worse poison that could be poured in our ears than these legacies of blame and hatred?

No wonder, then, that so many of us identify with Hamlet: the extraordinary genius of this play is the way it tricks us into recognizing that we, too, are tragic heroes. The metadramatic elements have as much to do with classical Stoicism as with literary criticism. Hamlet finally offers us nothing more, and nothing less, than a model for performing our painful roles most nobly. Whenever some haunting image from the past (like Hamlet's father) tells us who we must be and what we must die for, whenever friends (like Rosencrantz and Guildenstern) betray us for profit, whenever lovers (like Ophelia) suddenly inexplicably reject or disgust us, whenever all those things make us wonder who ruined the world we once dreamt of ruling, then we become Hamlet, and are glad to have his company as we sit in 'this distracted globe', in these 'goodly' prisons of body and world (2.2.242-4).

The Revenger's Tragedy

Traditional literary historians might agree with post-modern theorists that *The Revenger's Tragedy* cannot be safely attributed to any single author. Editors have regularly tugged suspiciously at the slender thread by which the attribution to Tourneur hangs, and the play fits easily into the repertoire of Middleton, plausibly even into that of Marston. Materialists and theorists

alike have recently advocated a new model in which the attribution of any play to any person is misleading, either because plays were collaborative productions not proprietary to their authors in the Renaissance, or because the entire concept of authorship is a sentimental modern fiction disguising the fact that authors (like other individuals) are not really autonomous agents, but products of their cultures. Indeed, Tourneur and Webster both might serve as cautionary instances for traditional practice, since the extremely meagre biographical record of both men has lured critics into absurdly circular arguments in which the plays serve as evidence of the attitudes of the playwrights, and those posited attitudes are then used to explain the plays.

In the case of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the same evidence supports both the traditional and the theoretical doubts about attribution. Deducing the author from internal evidence is difficult precisely because this tragedy seems so thoroughly a determinate product of its time. Many authors were writing this kind of satiric tragedy of horrors; it is full of devices (of plot, language, and stagecraft) familiar from earlier tragedies; and its fascination with the corruptions of lust and power at court seems to have been an obsession of the age. The device of disguising the body of the Duke for a second killing (5.1) comes from Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. The commonplaces uttered to the skull (3.5.84–98) distinctly recall *Hamlet*. There are traces of Chettle's *Hoffman*, and the revenger incorporates, among other stock roles, the pose of the murderous Machiavel (1.1.93–6). The absurdly improbable disaster in which two competing sets of killers coincidentally each endeavour to assassinate Lussurioso under the guise of coronation masques (5.3) suggests an ironic acknowledgment that this Senecan convention had become outworn. The author in effect declares his awareness that *The Spanish Tragedy* has been performed too often (something asserted more explicitly by other Jacobean authors),³³ and must be converted into black humour through hyperbole.

The mistrust of law that helps to fuel revenge tragedy as a genre is here abundantly endorsed. When Antonio's virtuous wife is raped, the power of the Duchess precludes the execution of justice – that is, the execution of her son the rapist (1.2). Antonio appears to be quoting proverbial wisdom when he remarks, '*Judgement in this age is near kin to favour*' (1.4.55). A few scenes later, when Lussurioso is arrested for supposedly attempting to kill his father the Duke, we see that the law is just as cynical an exercise in its severities as in its mercies (2.3). Finally, after the avengers have at

³³ *The Spanish Tragedy* is regularly parodied from Greene's *Orlando Furioso* (1591) to Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607); the Induction to Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* (1614) mocks spectators who 'swear *Jeronimo* and *Andronicus* are the best plays yet'.

last repaid the wrongs, the noble Antonio arrests them upon taking power, because 'You that would murder him would murder me' (5.3.105). Perhaps Jacobean censors would have resisted a play endorsing the killing of even such corrupt rulers; perhaps the author was squeezing an extra drop out of the requisite closing bloodbath; perhaps Antonio has some grounds to fear the precedent. Yet, having seen the play essentially through the eyes of the revengers, the audience is likely to experience this ending as one more proof that law bears very little relation to the felt truths of justice.

Though Vindice's opening soliloquy lacks the richness of contradiction that characterizes Don Andrea's induction to *The Spanish Tragedy*, it nonetheless establishes the polarity that gives *The Revenger's Tragedy* its fascinating energy. On the one hand, as he contemplates the skull of his murdered mistress, Vindice is the classic brooding revenger. But the alternative to the physical decay represented by the skull is merely the ethical decay embodied by the ruling family, not (as in *Hamlet*) the transcendent glory of the human mind. As he narrates the entrance of the court, Vindice offers a dumbshow apt to a satiric comedy rather than a Senecan tragedy. Again the peculiar amalgam of Renaissance literary consciousness is at work: the medieval obsession with physical deterioration must find a way to function within a classical satire on Jacobean social decadence. As in the opening lines of Donne's 'The Relique',³⁴ the rhapsodic description of the beloved's beauty and purity must endure interruption, not only by the acknowledgement that she is now merely a decaying skull, but also by cynical observations on sexual corruption:

When life and beauty naturally fill'd out
 These ragged imperfections,
 When two heaven-pointed diamonds were set
 In those unsightly rings – then 'twas a face
 So far beyond the artificial shine
 Of any woman's bought complexion,
 That the uprightest man (if such there be
 That sin but seven times a day) broke custom,
 And made up eight with looking after her.
(I.I.I7–25)

The sentence becomes a terrible let-down, and a significant one. If this is the only consequence of such beauty and virtue, then we have fallen very far from the Neoplatonic model of redemption. If Jacobean tragedies

³⁴ Donne's lyric tribute to chaste love begins, 'When my grave is broke up againe / Some second ghest to entertaine, / (For graves have learn'd that woman-head / To be to more than one a Bed)'.

reflect a bitter disappointment with the results of earlier Renaissance idealisms (a disappointment prophesied in *Doctor Faustus*), then this collapse of Petrarchan rhapsody entangles *The Revenger's Tragedy* in that cultural crisis from the opening scene. One may take sufficient revenge on the corrupt dukes with sword and poison, but the only recourse for a disappointed malcontent in the court of Renaissance culture is to inject cruelty and farce into its noblest undertakings. In this sense, the author of *The Revenger's Tragedy* – whoever he was, to whatever extent he was distinguishable from the culture as a whole – becomes the primary embittered revenger of his own play.

Vindice himself is a self-conscious playwright of poetic justice:

Now to my tragic business; look you, brother,
I have not fashion'd this only for show
And useless property; no, it shall bear a part
E'en in its own revenge. This very skull,
Whose mistress the duke poison'd, with this drug,
The mortal curse of the earth, shall be reveng'd
In the like strain, and kiss his lips to death.

(3.5.99–105)

Hippolito replies, 'Brother, I do applaud thy constant vengeance, / The quaintness of thy malice, above thought'. As tragedy becomes a more self-conscious ironic exercise in the Jacobean period, the applause is reserved for quaint malice rather than grand virtue. Vindice has the heroic role, but he taints it with the sardonic cruelty of the satirist, a popular figure at the start of the seventeenth century, deflected into drama from other genres by government censorship. The discrepancy between Vindice's heroic and satiric roles may correspond to a tragic schism between hope and experience in Renaissance England. Drama and society both yield to an increasing scepticism about the possibility of meaningful virtuous action – to the extent that John Ford will be obliged to find heroism, by a sheer act of assertion, within Giovanni's incest, blasphemy, and murderous mutilation of his beloved pregnant sister in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*.

The quaint malice of artful revenge generates only a sterile admiration; the notion of resorting to art when life ceases to make sense is delusive, because without a coherent meaning to sustain or subvert, art becomes merely distraction and decoration. As the final vestigial ideals concerning law, love, and nobility decay around them, the inhabitants of this play-world become puppets of desire and vengeance. The Duke, his heir Lussurioso, and his bastard Spurio are all destroyed through their jaded mechanical pursuit of lust; the rest fall through vengeful scheming. The anguish (anticipated

by *Doctor Faustus*) of attempting to live without spiritual absolutes, the anguish of the Renaissance gone astray, here manifests itself in the portrayal of a world in which people are nothing more than desperate little bodies consuming each other, indistinguishably in sex and murder. Even when his plot against Lussurioso backfires, Ambitoso can find no reason to change course, because the absolutes have become absurdly self-referential: 'there is nothing sure in mortality, but mortality. Well, no more words, 'shalt be reveng'd i' faith' (3.6.89–91). If human life has no meaningful connection to anything beyond, then revenge becomes the only game in town. The thunder and the comet that accompany the culminating vengeance are theatrical effects that carry no Christian conviction. Vengeance is still referred to as 'Murder's quit-rent', but no one is under the illusion that it really cures anything. The revengers save no one, and no one thanks them; Antonio, the only vindicated victim left alive, does quite the opposite. Furthermore, the essentialist naming of the central characters virtually forbids any redemptive conversions or growth beyond the functions of the plot. In this sense, *The Revenger's Tragedy* harks back towards the earlier allegorical drama, but it is hard to have a morality play without morality; there are only negative forces here, cynicism earns better success than faith, and Everyman can triumph only by joining the carnage in both body and spirit.

The pull of horror on our sympathetic emotions in *The Revenger's Tragedy* is rarely equal to the pull of excess on our comic intellect, particularly when we are coached by the hard-hearted jeerings of villains and avengers alike. Of the fatally victimized women who might have provided a focal point for sympathy, the only one who appears on stage is a grinning skull. In a classic misogynist dichotomy, women in *The Revenger's Tragedy* are either monsters of maternal corruption (the Duchess, who seduces her step-son, and Gratiana, who plays pander to her daughter) or passive occasions for male idealization and outrage (Antonio's wife, Vindice's dead mistress, and his living sister). The result is a slashing and haunting portrayal, funny and horrifying at the same moments, of a world propelled eagerly to ruin by blood-lust, sex-lust, and power-lust. Modern critics and audiences seem to enjoy *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a sort of Hallowe'en toy, and it does glow in the dark. Events seem so deeply inscribed into the *ethos* and the artistic conventions of the Jacobean period that we feel little guilt in our sadistic and voyeuristic pleasures. Still, the play should not be dismissed as camp. It thrives at second hand from the motives that first made rape, blood-revenge, and irreligion compelling topics for dramatic exploration, but the satiric detachment may itself be an important signal of cultural crisis. In a world learning to snigger at escalating outrages, perhaps people sought out experiences that might still rouse authentic horror, to test whether the innovations

of the Renaissance – including capitalism, colonialism, empiricism, and relativism – had completely deadened their former moral sensibilities.

Three tragedies of theodicy: *Doctor Faustus*, *Othello*, and
The Duchess of Malfi

Doctor Faustus

In the later sixteenth century, provoked by the accusatory zeal of Reformation theology, morality plays became increasingly likely to feed the protagonist to the stage prop known as the hell-mouth, marking his damnation. That is precisely what happens at the end of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, which puts the morality formula in the service of a devastating cultural critique. Faustus may be a remarkably brilliant and errant scholar, but he is also an Everyman who compels Renaissance audiences, and modern ones as well, to examine the perplexing choices facing a creature of desire and doubt in a changing world.

The play flirts with traditional moral allegory. The seven deadly sins parade across the stage, but Faustus enacts those same vices within common forms of human conduct. He receives conflicting advice from conventional good and evil spirits, but these spirits also take on human form as the good Old Man and Mephostophilis, who renew the tug-of-war on Faustus's final day. The play may thus serve as a sort of geological record of the old stark moralistic patterns of dramatic conflict metamorphosing into more subtle representations of ambivalence; in the process, the play similarly records the seismic collision of medieval and modern segments of Western spiritual history. The schematic battle among allegorical figures is still plainly visible here, but tied into the real temptations of a psychologically plausible human life. The vicious cycle of pride and despair becomes less demonology than psychopathology.

The moral of the story may seem orthodox and simple enough: to borrow a rhetorical question from the Book of Matthew, 'What profits it a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?' That moral becomes tragically complex, however, in a culture enthusiastically engaged in gaining the world (through imperialism, commerce, science, and humanistic philosophy) despite the Christian doctrines of humility and *contemptus mundi* to which it nominally still subscribed. From a medieval perspective the chief of sinners, Faustus from another perspective dies for the sins of modern civilization, which was evidently finding the temporal world less contemptible than before. Again, as in the Hegelian model, tragedy shows a hero answerable to the contradictory demands of two ruling deities of his culture, which nurtured and feared ambition. Faustus may seem Promethean, sacrificing

himself to liberate human aspiration from physical instrumentalities and superstitious constraints, until the 'heavens conspir'd his overthrow', in the ominous phrase of the opening Chorus. But to project Marlowe's own theological radicalism directly onto Faustus is to overlook the fact that tragedy is finally answerable less to an individual than to a culture, and less to opinion than to conflict. The Renaissance fusion is visible here in its full ambivalence. Magic appeals to Faustus because it allows intellectual activity to control the physical world;³⁵ he is betrayed, as were many Renaissance aspirations, by the impossibility of freeing his intellectual activity from materialist motives and the material sphere.

Faustus opens the play as the perfect Renaissance man, on the brink of great new enterprises. His perplexity looks familiar, and innocuous enough: the choices of a new graduate wondering whether to enter law school (but it is too boring), medical school (but people eventually die anyway), or graduate school in theology (but damnation is predestined – though Faustus here reads only a misleading fragment of the biblical text). Faustus's alternative career is sorcery, a practice that looks very much like an extension of the emergent Renaissance sciences: it involves astronomy, optics, ancient history, foreign languages, and navigation for exotic delicacies that may be exchanged for money and court favour. Faustus is even a Reformer, using his omnipotent book to attack the Pope and refute the power of Catholic rituals.

As in the foolish-wish motif of folklore, Faustus discovers that purchasing the privilege of violating the rules of nature is a bad bargain. The world he now commands is a small and flimsy one, and so the quest for transcendence generates only more claustrophobia. In exchange for his forfeited soul, Faustus receives merely some slapstick revenge, a little money, praise from the ignorant, unfulfilling fulfilments of his sexual fantasies, and a horrible spiritual emptiness. This list will seem unpleasantly familiar to many modern readers; even a relatively good life could easily be dismissed in some such terms, perhaps because consumerism in recent centuries has arguably offered poor recompense for losses of personal authenticity and religious faith. The play openly accuses Faustus of being responsible for his own fall through his wickedness and stupidity, but always reminds us on another level, whenever we assume a complacent stance of condemnation, that we may be making the same mistakes in less dramatic fashion. As in the Aristotelian model, the tragedy provides the audience with a catharsis of its shared tension by showing the fall of a great man, a fall which (to the extent that it results from his

³⁵ Barber, *Creating Elizabethan Tragedy*, p. 123, asserts that 'the heroic quality of the magic depends on fusing these divine suggestions with tangible values and resources of the secular world'.

characteristic error) rouses our pity, and (to the extent that it results from a characteristic problem of our culture) rouses our fear as well.

Instead of using the face of the skull to mock worldly ambitions, Marlowe here uses the face of the clown; an old iconographic tactic gives way to a dramatic one. The sub-plot (whether or not it is actually part of Marlowe's original conception)³⁶ underscores the stupidity of Faustus's pact. Faustus sneers at the petty uses the clown finds for his stolen magical powers, but his own magical works are not so different, and he has paid a far higher price for them. Wagner says the clown 'would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton', an offer the clown refuses unless the mutton has 'good sauce to it' (I.4.7–11); does Faustus appear any wiser when he uses his dearly bought powers to swipe food off the Pope's plate? It is more exalted gravy, but gravy nonetheless. The clown tries to use magic to pay his bar tab; Faustus uses his to defraud the horse-trader. The clown says he would use magic to shrink himself into a flea so that he could infiltrate women's underwear, and to enchant the kitchen-wench Nan Spit into dancing for him naked. Faustus's first demand of Mephostophilis is a beautiful spouse, and his final magical project is conjuring the legendary beauty of Helen of Troy.

In other words, *Doctor Faustus* is a parable about spiritual loss in the modern world, a warning, not only about damnation in the conventional sense, but about the fatal corruption awaiting all Renaissance aspirations. Faustus's early vision of glorifying the human race with a vast benevolent empire quickly fades, and instead he ends trying to please emperors with groceries and holography. He uses his magic, not to turn men into gods, but instead to turn his hecklers into beasts. Commerce becomes a confidence game, the quest for exotic treasures sinks to trivial gourmandizing, and the revived appetite for physical pleasures degrades to the most sterile kind of lust (the same trio of failings will recur comically in Ben Jonson's *Epicure Mammon* and *Volpone*). In the assault on the Pope, the Reformation becomes mere vandalism. Any idealistic era must fear that the movement will lose direction, that its spirit will sour. *Doctor Faustus* confirms that this anxiety lurked in English Renaissance culture from its early days: the fear that the brilliant dreams of converting humanity into a race of angels would instead – as in fact happened – fall into the hands of cheaters and tyrants who would use improved science and navigation to crush the spirits and plunder the lands of foreign peoples, and to brutalize their own people through improved weaponry and centralized government; that learning would become

³⁶ Neither the 1604 version nor the 1616 version provides a fully satisfactory text; see the Textual Introduction to *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge, 1973), II.123–59.

merely another tool of the class system, used to impress monarchs at court in hope of stray favours; that productions of beauty would be consumed in the ostentation of power.

The conversion of the earlier religious and allegorical versions of drama into a prototype of more naturalistic Renaissance tragedy in *Doctor Faustus* hardly involves a forfeiture of spiritual values. Instead, once again, the combination of grand spiritual questions with the detailed observation of real life creates a compelling new form of art. Tragedy is of course much older than Christianity, and offers its own wonderful inspirations and terrifying warnings for the human soul. Pride and despair, as reciprocal ailments of the human spirit, hardly began or ended with the Christian fervour of Western Europe in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. In his awe-inspiring final soliloquy, a terrified Faustus is unable to stop the flow of mortal time, and unable either to accept Christ's forgiveness or to bear God's wrath. He has nowhere to go, and he is rapidly going there. This is a Christian warning, certainly, but more than that it is a warning to anyone living in a world (like Marlowe's, or ours) that invites short-sighted pride in individual status and the technological achievements of our species, a world haunted by religious uncertainties and irrational denials of mortality. The wicked tempter is certainly a devil, but also plausibly stands for everything that stirs our superficial egotistical appetites, all the choices we will look back on at the hour of our death (as individuals, or perhaps as a species) and wonder what we have so proudly, blindly, spent our souls on.

Othello

Othello (1603–4) is a tragedy disturbingly grafted onto a budding comedy, a vision of social harmony undone by the persistent inscrutable agency of conflict and evil. *Othello* marks the beginning of Shakespeare's great tragic period, and the first half of the play is a classic comic plot,³⁷ a pair of true lovers overcoming the usual dramatic obstacles: discrepant origins, a repressive father who uses his legal authority to forbid the marriage, swordfights with domestic and foreign rivals, and separation by a storm at sea. But love and valour triumph; the Herald announces that the miraculous defeat of the Turks and the joyous reunion of the newlyweds will be celebrated with dancing and revelry, and calls down the blessing of Heaven on this happy little world of Cyprus. All that is missing for the ending of a typical Shakespearean comedy is the hero's closing couplet, and a few lines later we have that

³⁷ Susan Snyder, *The Comic Matrix of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Princeton, N.J., 1979) brilliantly explicates the functions of this kind of generic mixture.

too: 'Come my dear love: / The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue. / The profit's yet to come 'twixt me and you' (2.3.8–10). At precisely this instant, however, Iago re-enters. He watches this domestic bliss from the margin, like Milton's Satan, gazing – first with enchantment, then with bitter envy – at the joy of the loving couple in their Eden. If love is the fulfilling mystery that propels comedy, then jealousy is the hungry mystery that sits in the audience, like Iago on the battlements at Cyprus, feeling inferior or excluded, and needs to poison that happiness. The spectator becomes another voyeur, unwillingly complicit with Iago in the destruction of comic confidence. We meet the enemy of such joys in *Othello*, and it is us.

The destructive agent known as Iago is overdetermined in Renaissance dramatic convention. He is partly the scheming Machiavel common throughout Renaissance tragedy, partly the vengeful malcontent of revenge plays, partly the instigator of jealousy characteristic of domestic tragedy, and partly (as *Othello* suggests in the final scene) the devil incarnate of morality plays. The seemingly endless critical debate about Iago's motivation (like the projective interpretations of *Hamlet*) reflects a truth, rather than a confusion, about the play. This is a villain who seems to tap the very root of the evil that manifests itself in various ways in various other tragedies. Shakespeare invites us to distance ourselves from Iago by alluding to his diabolical attributes. But if it is disturbing to suspect that a devil may be lurking around us in human form, perhaps within our most trusted friend, it is even more disturbing to realize that this devil may be (as anthropology suggests most are) a reflection of our own destructive tendencies. Iago becomes the voice of pointless envy, the perpetual enemy of friendship, love, and trust that we have always rationally but futilely willed out of existence. Desdemona is the ally of those virtues, an ally we unwittingly banish. So the residue of morality drama, the theological allegory that makes Iago 'hellish' and Desdemona 'heavenly', is on one level (as in *Doctor Faustus*) a figurative acknowledgement that we meet evil tempters and good angels in human form every day. Torn between them is Othello, an inclusive kind of Everyman. He is animal and angel, pagan and Christian, black and white, soldier and lover, foreigner and patriot. Iago exploits those schisms, making Othello rant like a beast, renounce Christian belief for pagan magic and blood-sacrifice, feel ashamed of his blackness, turn the bloody honour of the soldier against the gentle heart of the lover, and, in committing suicide, turn the patriot fiercely against the foreigner.

Iago's effectiveness is plausible because he is an insider of social spheres where his victim inevitably lacks assurance. Iago is opaque precisely because he seems so typical: a bawdy, back-slapping, hard-drinking soldier who believes in practical thinking and male loyalty. The adept and oblique way he rouses and focuses Othello's doubts makes it hard for us to feel complacent,

to pass the kind of judgement Thomas Rymer did in the seventeenth century against Othello for mere brute stupidity. If any of us were to provoke a passionate secret resentment in a supposed friend who knew how to speak in perfect harmony with our own worst inward voices, offered to prove the truth of our worst fears of humiliation, and to justify all the worst vengeful impulses those fears provoke, we would doubtless fall also, even if we weren't a stranger in a strange land, the only black face in a city of white ones, a romantic innocent in a world of sexual intrigue.

Iago is an insider in another, more metaphysical sense as well: he appears at times to be less an actual person than a demonic possessor of the victims he reads so preternaturally well. He seems to be a catalogue of bad motives: social envy, sexual jealousy, lust and bloodlust, greed and pride. But instead of presenting us with a parade of the sins like that in *Doctor Faustus*, *Othello* hints at an essential spiritual deformity underlying all these forms of evil. Iago has a faculty of envy as insatiable as Faustus's faculty of desire, and thereby as devastating to his society as Faustus is to his own soul. Iago's peculiar encounters with the verb 'to be' are symptoms of the disease: 'Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago', 'I am not what I am', 'And knowing what I am, I know what she shall be', 'He's that he is... If what he might he is not, / I would to heaven he were' (1.1.57, 65; 4.1.73, 270-2). This version of the villainous Italianate 'New Man' is also a hollow man, a Machiavellian with no self to serve.³⁸ Iago has a pathological tendency to see other people in his place – his rank, his night-cap, his sheets – as if he were invisible to himself, as if a kind of ontological lack compelled him constantly to replenish himself from the more authentic selves around him. His revenge against those he suspects of stealing his share of human authenticity is to bankrupt their love, their trust, even their socially constructed identities: Brabantio declares in anguish that he no longer has a daughter, Cassio that he has lost his name and rank, Desdemona that she has lost her lord, and Othello that his occupation is gone, that he has no wife, and finally, that he is no longer 'Othello'. If there is any truth to the notion that subjective selfhood was being (re-)invented at this historical moment, then Iago may be seen as a first symbol – and a first victim – of existential inauthenticity. No jealousy could be more pervasive; like the jealousy of the dead towards the living that sometimes seems to be driving Don Andrea's ghost in *The Spanish Tragedy*, it could drive a man to decimate the world and gloat over the ruins.

³⁸ W. H. Auden, 'The joker in the pack' in his *The Dyer's Hand* (New York, 1962), comments on the difficulty of defending against a villain who seeks no profit but the satisfaction of a perverse spite.

At the end of the play Shakespeare taunts us with the riddle of Iago's motivation, by having Iago vow never to explain himself. Again Shakespeare repeats a convention (Hieronimo's refusal to testify in *The Spanish Tragedy*, for example) in a way that infinitely expands its suggestiveness. Why is this refusal so disturbing? Iago has explained that he resents Othello for promoting Cassio over him. But (in soliloquy, where only a profoundly inauthentic person would have reason to lie) he has also attributed his vengefulness to love of Desdemona, and hatred of Othello; he suspects Othello with his wife Emilia, or perhaps Cassio with Emilia; he covets Roderigo's money, or Cassio's 'daily beauty'. Psychoanalysts diagnose repressed homosexuality behind all the spite and evasions, as if this were nothing a little therapy couldn't clear up. Christian-minded critics focus on the allegory of an 'eternal villain', 'demi-devil', and 'viper' attacking the angelic Desdemona and dragging Othello's soul to damnation; nothing, in other words, that couldn't be cured by a good exorcist. Historical critics link Iago to the malcontent figures such as Bosola in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi*, embittered beyond reason or morality by lost promotions; so there is nothing here that cannot be explained away by theatrical tradition and Renaissance court politics.

Though each of these arguments has some validity, and Shakespeare provides each with ample material on which to build, their limitations reveal the impossibility of defining the problems that tragedy poses. Such answers are consoling, which is precisely why they are wrong. People turn to therapists, exorcists, or even historians, when their changing worlds place them in impossible and even inarticulate conflicts. The role of tragedy, ideally, is to acknowledge those conflicts, to represent them in their unconquerable complexity, and to offer no solution except endurance on the part of the hero and awed sympathy on the part of the audience. Brabantio can blame witchcraft when his world collapses, the Venetian Senate can blame the Turks, Lodovico can diagnose madness, Othello can see a devil. Modern critics can blame the Fall, capitalism, or patriarchy. If we could know who or what or why Iago is, if we could understand why the comic dreams of love fulfilled come unravelled, then we could control the destructive element. We cannot, and we go to tragedy to reconcile ourselves to that hard truth.

Venetian society is as desperate as modern criticism to analyse Iago's motives: 'Torments will ope thy lips' (5.2.305). Society must explain and isolate the agent of discord which it necessarily calls evil, the corrosive on its necessary lines of trust. But the inexplicable thing at the heart of evil – the evil in our hearts – cannot be so efficiently regulated. The deceptive movements of the Turkish fleet can be successfully analysed in the bright lights of the Senate chamber, but outside in the darkness a more inward enemy will wreak the same kind of destruction to the Christian state and its values. Iago is

the continuation of pagan subversion by other means, by the eternal enemy swirling in the storm around the little island of civilization here represented by Cyprus.³⁹ From the beginning to the end of the play Iago is the voice of street crime, of sexual violation and murder in the dark, the waking embodiment of Brabantio's wicked dream, all the fears that make people lock their doors at night. He allies himself with the 'Turk' – by the play's metaphor, the enemy of Christian civilization – within each Venetian: with Brabantio's racism and sexual possessiveness towards his daughter; with Roderigo's wastrel spending, illicit lust, and cold-blooded violence; and with the vanity, hostility, and lust accessible in Cassio through the devilish 'spirit of wine' (2.3.281–3).

Above all, Iago rouses the residue of pagan violence lurking in Othello. As the play moves geographically to the East, Othello seems to come back under the spiritual gravity of his old world, where handkerchiefs have supernatural force, where people mate like goats and monkeys, where women bear a sinister magic, where murder can be called sacrifice, and where justice is revenge in the dark rather than deliberation in the bright light of the official reason.⁴⁰ That is why Othello, unable to kill Iago, settles for killing this revived pagan self, a suicide by which he reasserts the identity that made him a hero in the Christian society:

And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian and traduc'd the state,
I took by th' throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him – thus. [*He stabs himself.*]

(5.2.352–6)

This amputation may save the status of the hero, but it cannot again protect his adopted society; the good that dies at the end of this tragedy does not really take the evil with it. Lodovico and the Venetian emissaries do what they can to clean up the mess: closing curtains around the bodies, reassigning Othello's responsibilities and possessions, designating punishments for the villain, and shutting things up with another couplet that promises a full report to the authorities. But these official formulae cannot assure us that evil has disappeared, especially not in performance, because we see all too plainly that Iago is still there – still here. Iago has emerged from nowhere, the hero has failed to kill him, and the authorities have failed to explain him. The state can send out armies against the infidels, build prisons and

³⁹ Alvin Kernan describes this symbolic siege in his superb Introduction to the Signet *Othello* (New York, 1963), pp. xxvii–xxix.

⁴⁰ Kernan, *Othello*, pp. xxix–xxxi, traces the effect of this migration on Othello.

torture racks for the criminals, but to some extent such efforts are merely symbolic gestures; the scapegoat may be confined, the tumour excised, but the cancer is still whispering from cell to cell in the body politic. The mere fact that someone cruelly destroys a potentially happy marriage is sad, but not necessarily tragic. What gives *Othello* its magnificence is the immense beauty of its language and its passions; what gives the play its lasting penetration is the warning that there is an enemy lurking in human nature, in each of our human natures, waiting for a chance to rewrite the potential joyful comedy of life into a tragedy.

The Duchess of Malfi

The Duchess of Malfi (in Webster's version of the story) is a young widow who, despite the fervent warnings of her brothers (Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal), decides to remarry. She successfully conceals this remarriage until the malcontent Bosola, hired by the brothers to spy on her, discovers that she has borne a son. After two more children appear, Ferdinand furiously confronts the Duchess, but she conceals her husband Antonio's identity (especially necessary because he had been her lowly steward) and smuggles him out of Amalfi. Unfortunately, she confides her plans to Bosola, so the couple are separated, and Ferdinand and Bosola torment the imprisoned Duchess with a swarm of madmen, a dead man's hand supposedly belonging to Antonio, and a wax *tableau pas encore vivant* supposedly showing her slaughtered husband and children. Bosola then strangles her, but her noble defiance at the point of death, and the continuing failure of the brothers to reward his service, convince him that he should save Antonio. Ironically, in his first effort to strike down the Cardinal, Bosola accidentally kills the man he had come to save; he does finally kill the Cardinal, only to exchange fatal wounds with Ferdinand, whose guilt concerning the Duchess has driven him into a lycanthropic madness.

This plot, based on events that took place a century earlier in Italy, is clearly less important than the play's vivid characters and haunting atmosphere. The action is generated by the jealousy, greed, and pride of the brothers, but the tragedy is less concerned with evil than with corruption, with the struggle of Bosola to maintain his integrity. Bosola is a spiritual kinsman of Vindice: a malcontent revenger whose strong moral instincts have been perverted by the decadent court he inhabits. He leads the moralized parade of characters which (as in *The Revenger's Tragedy*) opens the play, where he is described as the conventional 'railing' satirist; and his first words, a complaint of official neglect, mark him as the conventional malcontent: 'I have done you better service than to be slighted thus' (I.I.24, 33). This might identify Bosola as

another Iago, a treacherously 'honest' Italian confidant of the passionate unlikely lovers at the heart of the story. Iago, however, is interesting because his evil is too fundamental to be changed, whereas Bosola is interesting because the nobility of the Duchess reawakens his bitterly repressed virtues.

If it were not for the Duchess herself, *The Duchess of Malfi* would end this triad of theodicean tragedies in the same ironic vein as the triad of revenge tragedies. Without her steadfastness and tenderness, this would be a play of irony and scorn like *The Revenger's Tragedy*, rather than (as it proves) of passion and sorrow. Like *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi* toys with the queasy humour of theatrical self-consciousness, as in Delio's remark on the passage of time between the second and third acts. More often, however, Webster uses metadrama for serious interrogations of identity and predestination. The Duchess tells Bosola, 'I account this world a tedious theatre, / For I do play a part in't 'gainst my will' (4.1.99–100). This is partly Stoicism – an essential component of most Renaissance tragic heroism – but it is also (as in *Hamlet*) a commentary on tragic human destiny. For her to carry her archaic virtues successfully to the Jacobean audience, she must redeem the genre of the play she inhabits from the satiric tragedy of decadence and horror envisioned by Bosola.⁴¹

Unfortunately, as many critics have complained,⁴² *The Duchess of Malfi* does not end with the heroine's courageous death that closes the fourth act. She may be present in the wistful disembodied echo that subsequently tries to warn Antonio away from his doom, but that prophetic voice proves as futile as Cassandra's (5.3.21–54). She scores heroic victories against many of the villains of Jacobean culture – false pride of rank, greed for inheritances, religious doubt, political corruption, patriarchal tyranny – but her victories endure only within her subjectivity, which may itself be vulnerable to her death. The fact that Bosola inadvertently continues to do the work of evil when he tries to perform virtuous retribution suggests that this play-world suffers not from a few evil men or evil choices, but rather from a decadence so pervasive and an entropy so unprovidential that individual assertions count for little. The theodicy of *The Duchess of Malfi* thus becomes virtually the opposite of *Doctor Faustus*, where one person perversely rejected a Providential universe; now evil is a normative condition of civilization that only a heroic will can defy. As the decay of Elizabeth and the growth of

⁴¹ Norman Rabkin characterizes this tragedy as predominantly satirical in the Introduction to his edition of *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of 'The Duchess of Malfi'* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), p. 10; the volume contains many valuable essays and excerpts.

⁴² See for example William Archer, *The Old Drama and the New* (New York, 1929), p. 60. For a contrary view, see Lee Bliss, *The World's Perspective* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1983), pp. 158–9.

astronomy renew anxieties about mutability, and as Reformation theology commandeers popular consciousness, the notion that individual virtue can meaningfully affect destiny becomes enfeebled. This may help to explain the emergence of women as tragic protagonists: especially after the death of the Virgin Queen, male playwrights increasingly acknowledge this tragic deprivation of control as the normative condition of women. *The Duchess of Malfi* leaves us perplexed as to whether the heroine's long endurance is the redemptive truth of the tragedy, or whether the continuing descent into irony, error, and destruction in the final act proves that even such a magnificent embodiment of the old virtues cannot finally redeem a world – her Italian one or the author's Jacobean one – from a loss of meaning, an epidemic of moral as well as physical decay. She makes a good end and a beautiful corpse, but dying well may not be good enough.

Furthermore, her task as tragic protagonist is to escape precisely the grand scenes of ambition that Elizabethan tragic heroes pursued so avidly. All she seeks is happy domesticity with her accountant husband, and she faces assassination with pious acceptance and a last request that could hardly be more poignantly maternal, or further from questions of politics and revenge: 'I pray thee look thou givest my little boy / Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl / Say her prayers ere she sleep' (4.2.207–9). This subjugation of traditionally heroic values to bourgeois ones⁴³ may signal a growing Jacobean despair about the morality and manageability of the public sphere. The captured King Lear certainly seeks a comparably domestic refuge, forswearing all political involvement and begging permission merely to live in playful solitude with his daughter Cordelia.

In tragedy, some envious force on the fringe of the domestic paradise intervenes to subvert this familiar comic solution. *Othello* shifts suddenly and chillingly from the marriage celebration to the perspective of the villain; *The Duchess of Malfi* allows us our first glimpse inside the Duchess's happy household, only to confront us shockingly with its nemesis. As the Duchess banters with her husband and her serving-woman about sex, marriage, and grey hair, her companions sneak playfully out of the room, and she turns to find herself alone with her evil twin, the murderously jealous Ferdinand, who has overheard all this domestic prattle (3.2.1–79), and who will lie in ambush for years, if necessary, to reclaim her from her little world of bliss.

⁴³ Rabkin, *Interpretations*, p. 7, perceives a despondent Jacobean inversion of tragic values in this transformation of a great heroine into a 'good bourgeoisie'; Bliss, *The World's Perspective*, pp. 144–6, 167–8, explicates this idea perceptively. But even Faustus and Macbeth express regret, in their final moments, that they did not settle for pleasant little dinner-parties with their friends.

The impulse to use Renaissance arts to build a new Eden always proves a dangerous delusion in drama, whether that paradise is envisioned with tragic grandeur as in *Doctor Faustus*, with satiric excess as in Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610), or with a magical romantic aura as in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). In these three cases one can blame the new Fall on vanity; the forgotten darker side of human nature (embodied by devils, cheaters, and savages respectively) exacts retribution. In the case of the Duchess's domestic retreat, however, the audience confronts the possibility that destruction needs no licence from sin, that a mutable indifferent world consumes each caring mortal creature, that (as Bosola says) 'We are merely the stars' tennis balls, struck and bandied / Which way please them' (5.4.63-4). By sustaining her faith, hope, and charity until her final belated breath, the Duchess of Malfi strives to forestall that recognition, but her end is not the play's end, and her last word – 'Mercy' – hardly characterizes the random carnage of the closing scenes.

In the world of *The Duchess of Malfi*, 'all things have their end' (5.3.18), and no one has control – an impression the abrupt shifts in Webster's dramaturgy serve to reinforce. The magnificent Duchess may conceal and protect her family for a while, but punishment is promised and eventually performed. The tough and crafty Bosola may scheme, but his deeds contradict his own wishes, and even his successes are without reward. Ferdinand makes hyperbolic efforts to forbid and penalize his sister's remarriage, but she promptly defies both his warnings and his tortures, and madness soon prevents him from controlling even himself. The Cardinal, the most detached and powerful manipulator, finds events fatally run away from him even among his family and his hirelings, and dies with the saddest, most defeated last words of all: 'And now, I pray, let me / Be laid by, and never thought of' (5.5.112-13). Even the Duchess's surviving young son, who (in a familiar tragic consolation) righteously assumes power at the end, already seems doomed to early, violent death by the horoscope made at his birth (2.3.72-80).

Though it is facile to schematize cultural shifts by quoting lines out of context, it is hard to mistake the profound collapse of optimism signalled by the change from Faustus's youthful exclamation, 'O what a world of profit and delight, / Of power, of honour, and omnipotence, / Is promised to the studious artisan' (1.1.80-2), to Bosola's dying question, 'In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness, / Doth womanish and fearful mankind live?' (5.5.125-6). Faustus fails, but he leaves us thinking about the human mind; Jacobean tragedy more often reverts to the medieval model by leaving the skull instead, with its mocking grin, as our dominant impression. In Jacobean playwrights, as in the Metaphysical poets of the same

era, the spiritual component of human experience struggles perpetually to avoid eclipse by the physical. Bosola associates his own corruption from a moral idealist into a Machiavellian pragmatist with the Renaissance fashion in painting that rejected the grand iconic style in favour of realistic reproduction of the lowliest things: 'Now for this act, I am certain to be rais'd, / And men that paint weeds to the life are prais'd' (3.2.378–9).

At the same time, however, Jacobean tragedy and Metaphysical poetry commonly strive to rescue individual experience and expression from absorption by the conventional. *The Duchess of Malfi* resonates this fundamental Renaissance ambivalence about the relative values of the abstract (which imposes impersonality, but may permit transcendence) and the empirical (which permits individual experience, but imposes the limits of physicality). T. S. Eliot remarks that 'The art of the Elizabethans is an impure art' because they sought 'to attain complete realism without surrendering any of the advantages which as artists they observed in unrealistic conventions'⁴⁴; but contamination can sometimes be enrichment, and so it is in the case of Webster's dramaturgy.⁴⁵ Though many of the devices of plot and spectacle in *The Duchess of Malfi* are quite conventional, the powerful impression of doomed personality evoked by the fragments of Webster's poetry is not; once again the tragic hero inhabits a universe that constantly threatens to eradicate her individuality. The Duchess herself gratifyingly combines unrealistic extremes of conventional virtue with realistic bodily frailties, including impetuous appetites for food and sexual love; the plot of the play, concerning her doomed determination to obey her personal desires, is virtually inseparable from the tension inherent in the literary form itself. She is a heroic individual, a tautology in that Renaissance tragedy made individuality a precondition for heroism, an oxymoron in that conformity to a heroic role necessarily entails some surrender of individual traits, and loyalty to the heroic principles commonly leads to the obliteration of individual existence in death. Even the Duchess, who abjures traditional public heroism for the sake of private experience, must endure this bitter paradox.

So it is not surprising that the Renaissance tragic hero is so often shadowed by a negative image of individualism: the self-fashioned, self-conscious Machiavellian villain who coldly assumes that human identity has neither a stable core nor a meaningful connection to anything beyond itself. The brothers lure Bosola into this condition, and the Duchess retrieves him from

⁴⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'Four Elizabethan Dramatists' in *Selected Essays* (London, 1951 edn), pp. 114–16.

⁴⁵ Inga-Stina Ekeblad, 'The "impure art" of John Webster' in Rabkin, *Interpretations*, pp. 49–64, comments on the potential richness of such mixtures.

it by sustaining her virtues through the worst morbid and mordant scenarios he can cast her in. The fear and pity that the malcontent Bosola feels may therefore pass through him to the cynical audience of Jacobean tragedy. In the haunting *pas de deux* of the torture scene – a scene of modern absurdist, more than medieval macabre, terror – the archetypal confrontation between the heroic individual and the implacable, impersonal forces of the physical universe becomes starkly visible. Bosola comes to the Duchess aptly disguised as a tomb-maker and as the old bell-man who visits condemned prisoners; when her personal misery leads her to curse ‘the world / To its first chaos’, he tauntingly replies, ‘Look you, the stars shine still’ (4.1.118–20). Yet in the following scene, as Bosola relentlessly attacks her morale with his *memento mori* commonplaces, the Duchess replies defiantly, ‘I am Duchess of Malfi still’ (4.2.115–39). These counterpoised declarations are each manifestly true. Death (accelerated by the evils of pride, greed, and jealousy that propel the other tragedies of theodicy) does indeed destroy her, and the universe goes on. But she also retains her heroic integrity in the very face of death, forbids it to compromise the power of her will and the tenderness of her heart. Compelled to adjudicate this confrontation, the audience must internalize the tragic ambivalence, the choice between absorption in the determinate forces of decay, and futile rebellion on behalf of the human individual and her unfathomable capacity for love.

Conclusion

Ideally, the modern audience of Renaissance tragedy must remain simultaneously aware that the plays were created within a particular historical context, and that they may still bear on the audience’s own world. A tragedy is a product of very specific issues in crisis at the time of its generation; continuities and analogies may also allow it to speak to persistent problems of human existence. The critical movement called New Historicism shares with old-fashioned historical criticism a tendency to isolate the plays as political artifacts and allegories: the old version tried to determine which courtiers are being praised or mocked in which characters, whereas the new one tries to determine which cultural orthodoxies and governmental powers are being implicitly endorsed or subverted, but the interpretive attitude is generally comparable.

Though such information is certainly useful, allowing it to estrange us from the implied psychological experience of the characters is wasteful, because there are at least two important ways of connecting the past with the present. The liberal-humanist viewpoint, which has been fundamental to most teaching of Renaissance tragedy (and may have been fundamental to the writing

of that tragedy as well),⁴⁶ suggests that canonical literature is the vessel by which eternal human truths and values are conveyed across time. Opposing this rather patrician and ahistorical model is a cultural-materialist approach that seeks in Renaissance tragedy the ancestry of modern radicalism,⁴⁷ a frequency-channel on which ideas that undermine the status quo and common wisdom of dominant Renaissance cultures (by exposing them as arbitrary) were already audible. The theatre is thus a place of subversion – though (some New Historicists now believe) a strategically isolated one, a dead virus used to inoculate the body politic against revolutionary tendencies.

Surely art does both things: preserves cultural values and tests their weaknesses. Surely there is validity in both the liberal-humanist fear of losing the past with its accreted moral wisdom, and the cultural-materialist fear of remaining inscribed in regressive values; there is virtue in both the traditional insistence that personal experience must not be obliterated by systematic political thinking, and the revolutionary warning that sentimental focus on the tragic individual conduces to quietism concerning the mechanisms of widespread social injustice. Circumventing the severe but literal-minded censorship of the Revels Office, Renaissance tragedy was often an expression of anarchical popular will and a cry of protest against the shared agonies of historical change, but it may not have its ultimate reference, or offer practical solutions, to specific political or economic problems, because it cannot isolate or erase the contradictions created by our cognitive failings, by our simultaneous co-operation and competition in the business of survival, by our mixed nature as mental and physical beings, or by our status as creatures aware of our ineluctable and imponderable mortality. These are not crises of an age, but for all time.

Still, the points of contestation in a late-twentieth-century intellectual community often diverge from those of Elizabethan culture, so modern students and theatre audiences may feel compelled to highlight and to challenge aspects of the plays that are likely to have been inactive ingredients to Elizabethan consumers. Some scholarship discerns tragedians who were prophetic, but necessarily covertly so, in challenging the humanistic presumptions, the class system, the gender discrimination, even the Christianity

⁴⁶ Hardin Craig, 'The shackling of accidents' in R. J. Kaufman, ed., *Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism* (New York, 1961), p. 24, argues that the Renaissance 'doctrine of imitation . . . rests ultimately upon the great doctrine of similitude. The Renaissance looked upon man as a universal being repeating in his life the deeds of all men . . . Men's actions are always alike because their natures are always the same.'

⁴⁷ See for examples the essays in Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, eds., *Political Shakespeare* (Manchester, 1985), and John Drakakis, ed., *Alternative Shakespeares* (London, 1985).

of their societies. Other scholarship assumes the tragedians were complacent or even propagandistic on these points,⁴⁸ and attacks them for that failing. Is *The Changeling* a proto-feminist play for showing its female protagonist destroyed because (like Gertrude in *Hamlet*) she has no imputed power except as an object of sexual and marital desire? Or a sexist play, for failing to focus our outrage on that aspect of her dilemma? Or an historical artifact to which modern feminist terminology cannot justly or productively be applied? Similar questions can of course be raised about racism in Marston's *Sophonisba*, anti-Semitism in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, or the class system in Fletcher's *Bonduca* (1611–14). The questions are impossible to answer, and well worth asking.

In fact, tragedy is a genre of unanswerable questions that are worth asking. Renaissance theatres were, as the authorities often suspected, the breeding-grounds of profoundly seditious conspiracies – not because the heroes advocated destruction of the social order, but because the tragic dilemmas of those heroes performed a kind of deconstruction on the limiting and contradictory aspects of the current vocabulary of belief. Every culture has lines of enquiry it must forbid in self-defence; the Renaissance strained the mechanisms of repression and diversion to their limits, and one result was a variety of great drama. When ideology loses its ability to explain away human suffering and mortality, what remains is a sympathetic recognition of our kinship with the victims. Tragic theatre is not only a precious institution for the negotiation of cultural change, it is also the supreme instrument for nurturing such sympathy. For most students and audiences the language of Renaissance tragedy must now be almost opaque, the conventions unfamiliar; yet something survives that makes the modern appreciation of these works more than merely archaeological. Is it really surprising that dramatic confrontations with jealousy, revenge, and mortality should exercise continuing power? No mystical theory of archetypes is required to justify the belief that human beings can recognize, learn from, and care about the suffering of even their distant kindred. This is not to exclude the diversity of human experience by sentimental appeal to an essentialist idea of human nature, but rather to acknowledge the force of shared recognitions when they are made available – and tragic theatre has long been the most compelling medium for the shared recognition of what many human beings, in their passions and their losses, have in common.

⁴⁸ E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London, 1943), has been the main target of revisionists seeking to liberate the plays from the hierarchical ideas of their time, or seeking to prove that those ideas were in fact the propaganda of the power élite rather than universal belief.

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A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904), with its commonsensical emphasis on character and plot, provided the foundation for much twentieth-century dramatic criticism, though its assumptions have been widely attacked, for example in Catherine Belsey's feminist *The Subject of Tragedy* (1985), and in Jonathan Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* (1984), which emphasizes the genre's subversions of Christian humanism. Other classic works from earlier in the century include G. Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* (1930), M. C. Bradbrook's *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (1935), and Theodore Spencer's *Death and Elizabethan Tragedy* (1936). Madeleine Doran's *Endeavors of Art* (1954) provides a broadly enlightening survey of the traditions shaping Elizabethan drama. On the native ancestors of English Renaissance tragedy, see Willard Farnham, *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (1936) and David Bevington, *From 'Mankind' to Marlowe* (1962). On the Senecan factor, see F. L. Lucas, *Seneca and Elizabethan Tragedy* (1922), with valuable updates in G. K. Hunter, 'Seneca and the Elizabethans', *Shakespeare Survey* 20 (1967); Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition* (1985); and Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare and Classical Tragedy* (1992). For mainstream scholarship on the revenge tradition, see Fredson Bowers, *Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy* (1940); for a revisionist view, see Susan Jacoby, *Wild Justice* (1983); for a broader view, see John Kerrigan, *Revenge Tragedy: Aeschylus to Armageddon* (1996). On the genesis of the villain figure, Bernard Spivack's *The Allegory of Evil* (1958) is widely cited. J. W. Lever's *The Tragedy of State* (1971) provides a fine, learned survey of politics in the genre.

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Tragedy (1967); Roger Stilling, *Love and Death in English Renaissance Tragedy* (1976); Nicholas Brooke, *Horrid Laughter in Jacobean Tragedy* (1979); Thomas McAlindon, *English Renaissance Tragedy* (1986); Roland Wymer, *Suicide and Despair in the Jacobean Drama* (1986); and Raphael Falco, *Charismatic Authority in Early Modern English Tragedy* (2000).

Neither Cultural Materialist criticism (despite the impressive efforts of Terry Eagleton, Peter Stallybrass, and others), nor its American cousin, New Historicism (best represented in the work of Stephen Greenblatt), has yet colonized tragedy as successfully as they have several other Renaissance genres. Nor has deconstruction found especially good hunting, perhaps because the tragedies are avowedly multivocal and indeterminate. Some structuralist arguments, based in anthropology, have gained attention, such as René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), which describes tragic theatre as an essential social ritual used to forestall potentially endless cycles of blood-revenge; and Susan Cole's *The Absent One* (1985), which describes tragedy as a displaced ritual of mourning. Robert N. Watson, *The Rest is Silence* (1994), and Michael Neill, *Issues of Death* (1997), explore mortality as a provocation and topic of tragedy. Stephen Booth, 'King Lear', 'Macbeth', *Indefinition, and Tragedy* (1983), develops superb close reading into a theoretical insight. Timothy Reiss's *Tragedy and Truth* (1980) attempts to provide a sophisticated theoretical view covering several periods and nationalities; Reiss's 'Renaissance theatre and the theory of tragedy', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: The Renaissance*, (vol. III) ed. Glyn P. Norton (2000), offers an excellent, information-packed summary of scholarly views across early modern Europe.

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Tragedy

Texts

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JAMES BULMAN

Caroline drama

The repertory and the audience

UNTIL recently, it was customary to lump together all plays written during the reign of Charles I as Cavalier drama.¹ These plays were thought to have appealed exclusively to an élite courtly audience that patronized private theatres and to have ignored those alternative ideologies that had animated the more popular drama written during the reigns of James and Elizabeth. And indeed, there were such plays: pastoral and heroic romances promoted royalist ideals by allegorizing the court, and witty comedies celebrated the manners of Cavalier society. Yet Cavalier drama did not figure significantly in the repertory of the theatres, which throughout the Caroline period survived on Elizabethan revivals. The old-style popular playhouses – the Fortune, the Red Bull, and, in the summer, the Globe – were sustained almost exclusively by a nostalgic and nationalistic diet of apprentice plays, pseudo-histories, chivalric adventures, and low-life farces. With their old-fashioned spectacle, festive exuberance, and indecorous mixture of kings and clowns, such plays appealed to a regressive plebeian taste. But the fashionable theatres, too – the Blackfriars, the Phoenix, and the Salisbury Court – indulged this Elizabethan nostalgia by including many old ‘popular’ plays in their repertories.

These plays, in fact, were frequently revived at the expense of new plays. The state of the theatre was far from healthy during the first years of Charles’s reign. Several of the great Jacobean dramatists had died or retired from the stage, and theatre companies, perhaps sensing a waning interest at court, grew chary with commissions: a robust count of thirty-six new plays, masques, and academic dramas in 1624 declined to only nine in 1630.² The majority of new plays, furthermore, were still informed by uncourtly (if not anti-royalist) attitudes and borrowed heavily from popular drama of the

¹ Alfred Harbage’s account of theatre in the period, for example, is simply called *Cavalier Drama*.

² Harbage, *Annals of English Drama*.

preceding age – from Shakespeare and Webster, from Jonson and Middleton. It is tempting, therefore, to measure them by the moral fervour of their originals and find them wanting. Such judgement, though, may be unfair, for however much Caroline playwrights were indebted to earlier drama, they adapted it to a new context and dramatized issues of immediate social and political concern. By doing so, they found voices of their own.

Economic concerns were one such issue. Rapid social mobility, and particularly the influx of people from the country into London, had upset the traditional distribution of wealth: commercial interests put money increasingly into the hands of the middle class – merchants, lawyers, tradesmen – and left many gentlemen impoverished.³ Money supplanted land as the chief source of power and prestige, and the rivalry between commercial enterprise and inherited wealth disrupted the conservative social hierarchy in which old noble families reigned indisputably supreme. Rich merchants were now in a position to buy estates forfeited by the nobility; young nobles, in turn, were forced to marry ‘down’ in order to keep those estates. James had further cheapened the nobility by selling titles. But more dire than this redistribution of wealth was the lack of it: high unemployment and widespread poverty had become a drain on national resources and a blot on England’s pride. In this context, the court’s self-indulgence, its ostentatious display, its cultivation of fashion, its abuse of power – in short, its morality – were open to criticism.

Opposition to the Caroline court is often said to have sprung from ‘puritanism’, and there is some justice in this claim, for puritans felt threatened by Charles’s empowerment of the bishops and by his apparent neutrality towards Protestant countries in foreign affairs. Fundamental disagreement over matters of church and state, furthermore, prompted Charles to dissolve Parliament in 1629 and, for the next eleven years, to exercise personal rule – years during which those critical of the court grew ever more vocal. So-called ‘puritan’ values came to be shared not only by the sectarians so often lampooned in earlier drama, but by a growing body of nobility and gentry who opposed Charles’s policies.⁴

The gentry are usually identified with the country, and their determination to preserve traditional liberties placed them squarely in opposition to courtly patronage, to courtly élitism, and, worst of all, to the court’s economic exploitation of the country for private ends. The gentry valued a stable social order founded on the rights of place and property, and their provincial

³ Hirst, *Authority and Conflict*.

⁴ On the relationship of puritanism to the drama, see Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*, pp. 200–57, and Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 84–99.

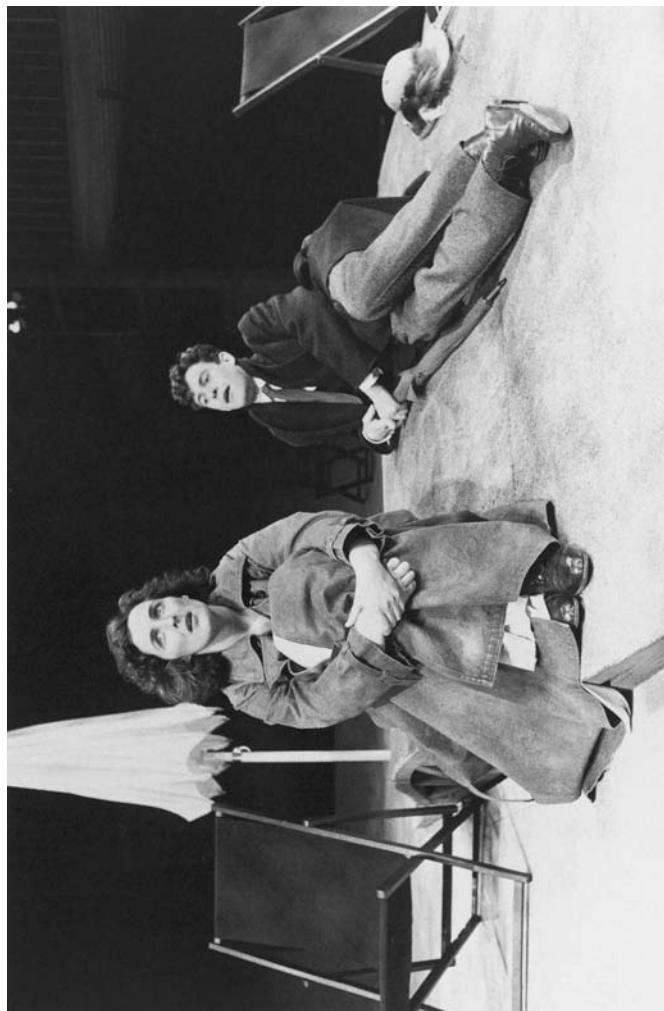
paternalism clashed with Charles's national paternalism. Others, too, joined the chorus of disapproval: city merchants who objected to Charles's granting of monopolies, lords out of favour or fearful of the court's Catholic orientation. Those critical of the court, therefore, were not a homogeneous group, but a loose alliance; yet their geographic demarcations grew less distinct as the gentry flocked to London in search of entertainment and commercial gain, thus creating a fashionable town, as distinct from the city, in which to gather opposition to court policy.

In the town, private theatres were a focal point for entertainment; audiences were drawn from a mixture of privileged classes – from court, town, and city alike. The commonly accepted notion that audiences at these theatres formed an exclusive courtly coterie thus is not entirely accurate.⁵ Although more aristocratic than the pluralist crowds at public theatres, Caroline audiences in fact represented diverse social and political views. The dramatist of the previous generation who had best understood the tastes and values of such fashionable audiences was John Fletcher. Although he died in 1625, the same year as King James, he nevertheless exerted considerable influence on later dramatists, and his plays – mostly tragicomedies in which threats to the social and political hierarchy, and often to the court, are introduced only to be swept away in a tide of romantic improbability – were frequently revived on the Caroline stage.

Fletcher's distinctive treatment of social and political issues characterizes the work of certain Caroline dramatists as well, especially those who, like James Shirley, adapted the forms of Jacobean drama for an audience that no longer shared its values. The most prolific of Caroline writers, with over thirty plays to his credit, Shirley was a favourite at court. His imitations of plays by Shakespeare, Webster, and Tourneur largely eschew the criticism of courtly society found in the originals: they have topicality without a Jacobean moral thrust. Yet they are not stereotypically Cavalier drama either. Shirley's best plays, especially his comedies, straddle the worlds of court and town – the court, whose members he wished to please, and the town, from whose ranks his audience increasingly came.

Hyde Park (1632) is a case in point. An elegant comedy of manners, it resembles *Much Ado About Nothing*, shorn of its Italian locale and set instead in a world of fashion where the gentry rub elbows with the nobility. Far from the commercial London depicted in Jacobean city comedy, Shirley's London resembles the aristocratic milieu of Shakespearian romantic comedy. Hyde Park itself – a new and fashionable place of recreation – is equivalent to

⁵ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, pp. 100–40; also Michael Neill, “‘Wits most accomplished Senate’: the audience of the Caroline private theatres”, *SEL* 18 (1978), 341–60.



23 Barry Kyle's 1987 Royal Shakespeare Company production of Shirley's *Hyde Park*, Swan Theatre

those green worlds where characters repair to play love games and to make all odds even. The main characters, too, are Shakespearian. Mistress Carol, fetching her lineage from Beatrice and Kate, mocks her suitors mercilessly and uses wit to hide her affection for the man she truly loves, Fairfield, while he, a contemporary Benedick, wins the game by forcing her to pledge that she will never love him, then making her jealous when he flirts with another woman (actually his sister) in Hyde Park. Carol is a splendid example of a new kind of woman – apparently ‘liberated’ – who owes her being as much to puritan reform as she does to Shakespeare. The old aristocratic double standard by which arranged marriages led men to commit adultery was gradually being challenged by the ideal of a chaste marriage based on love and mutual respect.⁶ As a consequence, women in certain fashionable circles achieved greater social freedom than they had once had, and such freedom is satirically expressed in Carol’s sermon to Mrs Bonavent on the virtues of a single, economically independent life:

What is in your condition makes you weary?
 You are sick of plenty and command; you have
 Too, too much liberty, too many servants;
 Your jewels are your own, and you would see
 How they will show upon your husband’s wagtail.
 You have a coach now, and a christian livery
 To wait on you to church, and are not catechised
 When you come home; you have a waiting-woman,
 A monkey, a squirrel, and a brace of islands,
 Which may be thought superfluous in your family,
 When husbands come to rule . . .
 And will you lose all this, for
 I, Cicely, take thee, John, to be my husband?
 (1.2, p.475)

However reflective of new bourgeois attitudes, Carol’s feminism in fact rejects marital equality for a brand of personal rule that borders on tyranny. Such rule allies her with Charles’s court rather than with the town and thus defies the social compromise for which certain ‘puritan’ elements in society strove.⁷

To demonstrate alternatives, Shirley balances the main plot with two parallel plots, each reflecting a different conception of marriage and woman’s

⁶ See Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (London, 1975), pp. 3–5 and chapter 1, ‘The idea of chastity’, *passim*. A different view is taken by Kathleen Davies, ‘Continuity and change in literary advice on marriage’ in R. B. Outhwaite, ed., *Marriage and Society* (London, 1981).

⁷ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 178.

place. In one, Mrs Bonavent chooses to ignore Carol's advice and to remarry on the very morning that her husband, presumed dead for seven years, returns home in disguise. Joining the wedding festivities, he reveals his identity late in the game, just in time to save his wife from unwittingly committing adultery with her new 'husband'. This romantic plot, by dramatizing the virtues of chastity and constancy in marriage, tempers the excesses of Carol's more liberal philosophy.

The other plot broaches the responsibilities of class. In it, the chastity of Fairfield's sister Julietta is tested by her jealous suitor Trier, who encourages the rakish Lord Bonville to seduce her. By virtue of his social position, Bonville expects women of an inferior class to bow to his will, and Julietta is sensible of her obligations to a man of his rank. His noble blood, fortunes, and titles, she admits, 'are characters / Which we should read at distance', for 'where the king has sealed / His favours, I should show humility' (5.1, p. 529). But as Bonville presses her to collapse that social 'distance' by giving in to his importunity, she reads him a stern lesson in class obligation, claiming that unless he proves 'a friend to virtue', she will 'in such infinite distance' be 'As much above [him] in [her] innocence' (pp. 529–30). In the tones of puritan homily she proceeds to instruct him in the proper behaviour for a lord, who, as a member of England's ruling class, ought to set an example for those beneath him; and as she shames him by enumerating the 'sins of [his] wild youth' – fornication, adultery, atheism – she reveals how the bourgeoisie may contest the nobility's abuse of power yet at the same time preserve a respect for its authority.

Shirley thus dramatizes a compromise between court and town. Mildly critical of the excesses of both, in Carol's feminism and Bonville's lechery, he nevertheless demonstrates how, in the pastoral retreat of Hyde Park, discord among classes may yield to harmony. This harmony is achieved in the conventional reconciliations of romantic comedy: the sharp-tongued protagonists forsake wit for plain declarations of love, a husband returns to his wife as if by miracle, a suitor is taught a lesson about jealousy, a lord is converted to honesty by a good woman's virtue, and all is as innocent as maidenhead. By suggesting that London's privileged classes may happily coexist so long as they honour their obligations to one another, Shirley promotes an essentially conservative ideal. Yet his compromise is morally disengaged; for by idealizing social relations, he evades the moral and political questions that gave rise to class divisions in the first place.

To measure its disengagement, we may compare *Hyde Park* with a tragicomedy by Massinger that deals with similar class divisions and violations of social obligation. *The Picture* (1629) concerns the knight Mathias's test of his wife's virtue – a test similar to Trier's test of Julietta, only more

fantastical and far removed from fashionable London. Leaving his country estate for the Hungarian wars, Mathias takes with him a magic picture of his wife which will change colour if she is tempted by another man in his absence. In the event, Mathias is more sorely tempted to fall at the Hungarian court – and by the queen, no less – than is his wife Sophia by remaining at home. She easily spurns the advances of two wanton courtiers sent by the queen to debauch her, and, when told of her husband's magic picture, she gives vent to a self-righteous fury that threatens the comic resolution.

Mathias begs her forgiveness, but she will not be easily placated. She denounces him as a miscreant and demands a divorce, challenging the double standard in sexual morality: 'therefore know / And 'tis my boon unto the King, I do / Desire a separation from your bed' (5.3.178–80). Massinger here takes womanly indignation much further than Shirley does when Julietta scolds Trier for his suspicion: where Julietta offers Trier 'charity', Sophia insists on justice. She embodies the puritan ideal of equality in marriage, and only when everyone in attendance – led by the queen, on her knees – begs her to take pity on Mathias does she agree to be reconciled.

Massinger juxtaposes this ideal of marriage with the practice at the Hungarian court. There, the royal marriage is not in balance: the king dotes on his wife so much that he ignores the conduct of his own wars, and he vests such power in her that he becomes a mere 'vassal' before her 'absolute tyranny' (1.2.142). More pointedly, Massinger exposes the court as a place of sexual intrigue, humiliation, and, literally, bondage. The queen envies her subjects' chastity and so would ruin it; by threatening violence should Mathias not accede to her demands, she demeans the power vested in her. Massinger thus incriminates the court for failing in its obligations to those classes who look to it for an example. The court corrupts where it should educate. Paradoxically, *The Picture* dramatizes how the gentry can educate the court: Mathias's steadfastness leads the queen to virtue. Yet her conversion does not mitigate the potent moral criticism that pervades the play. Unlike Shirley, Massinger was an uncompromising moralist who recognized in the ideals of puritanism an ethos finer than that of the court. There is an incisive political message in Sophia's victory over the queen.

The ethos of Caroline tragedy

Shirley never treated virtue and vice so seriously as Massinger. Even in his tragedies, where moral questions might have weighed most heavily, he strove for intricacy rather than depth, content, like Fletcher, to manipulate the conventions he had inherited from earlier dramatists but to sidestep their ideological concerns. Indeed, no one else handled the conventions of revenge

tragedy so dextrously, as the enduring popularity of *Love's Cruelty* (1631), *The Traitor* (1631), and *The Cardinal* (1641) attests. If these plays seem like inferior reworkings of Kyd or Webster or Tourneur, they none the less adopt a sophisticated courtly ethos that makes them distinctive.

Shirley depicted the court as a place of conventional Italianate corruption. Politics were infected by sexual intrigue, dukes were lechers, their attendants were Machiavels with an eye to the main chance, and women had to die to preserve their chastity. All this was formulaic; it pandered to a taste for lurid tragedy that had changed little from the days of James. Unlike their Jacobean precursors, however, Shirley's tragedies do not indict the court politically. Their moral posturing lacks the conviction, and their satire the moral sting, of the originals. *The Traitor*, for example, broaches the issues of regicide and usurpation which, since Elizabeth's reign, had lodged fearfully in the public imagination;⁸ but for Shirley, these issues were only part and parcel of theatrical tradition, devices to heighten suspense but devoid of any special moral significance.

Rather, Shirley lavished attention on what has been called the 'choreography' of intrigue.⁹ The main plot of *The Traitor* embellishes the well-known intrigues of *The Revenger's Tragedy*: Lorenzo, kinsman to the Duke of Florence and a Machiavel, plots to supplant the Duke, and his chief strategy for doing so requires him to get the irascible Schiarra to procure his sister, the chaste Amidea, to satisfy the Duke's lust. Like Vindice, Schiarra is a mal-content who, disgusted by courtly corruption, 'rehearses the satiric clichés of Jacobean tragedy';¹⁰ and Lorenzo cunningly ensures Schiarra's complicity in his scheme by promising that they will murder the Duke when he is in Amidea's bed. Schiarra makes love to his employment: playing the role of Vice, he tempts his sister to sin. She, however, resolves to '[S]tand in the ivory register of virgins' unto death (2.1.254); and Schiarra, satisfied that she has passed the chastity test, tells her of Lorenzo's scheme. In the bedroom scene that follows, Shirley ingeniously stands Tourneur's plot on its head, for rather than be an accessory to crime, Amidea prefers to seduce the Duke to virtue by a show of her own nobility. Calling upon 'Lucrece's fair example', she wounds herself in the arm with a poniard and threatens suicide unless the Duke repents. Her success momentarily turns the play into a tragicomedy:

⁸ Alvin Kernan discusses the enactment of regicide on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, and its emotional impact on audiences, in J. Leeds Barroll *et al.*, eds., *The Revels History of Drama in English*, Vol. III (London, 1975), p. 251.

⁹ Gordon Braden, 'James Shirley', *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 58 (Detroit, 1987), p. 257.

¹⁰ Kathleen McLuskie, in Philip Edwards *et al.*, eds., *The Revels History of Drama in English*, Vol. IV (London, 1981), p. 250.

the familiar device of a woman proving her chastity through violence had never been used to such sensational effect.

In the remaining acts, Shirley plays baroque variations on Tourneur and on Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* as well. Schiarra, now identified as a traitor, pleads with his sister – this time in earnest – to save his life by capitulating to the Duke's reawakened lust. (Lust in great ones seldom sleeps.) Schiarra is at once adamant and reluctant, wishing to spare her chastity yet arguing that if she does not sacrifice it in a good cause, she will be raped anyway. For her part, Amidea (like Isabella in *Measure for Measure*) shames her brother for equating the loss of her immortal soul with his own paltry loss of life. But then she reverses her strategy. To force him to recognize the ignominy of what he is entreating her to do, she pretends to give in; but Schiarra, suddenly struck with horror by her capitulation, mortally wounds her. She, however, lives long enough to forgive him and vow to her older brother that she stabbed herself – an echo of Desdemona's dying words that had become *de rigueur* for self-sacrificing Jacobean heroines. In Shirley, then, crises of honour and chastity are titillating rather than morally earnest. They serve only to precipitate the sudden reversals, clever shifts of role, and misunderstood trials that are the glories of his art. By stripping off the layers of moral philosophy that sometimes encrusted earlier revenge plays, Shirley, like Fletcher, drew attention to the artifice of his own construction. The manipulation of plot – the outdoing of earlier practitioners in the genre – was an end in itself; and the behaviour of his characters was determined almost exclusively by the traditions of revenge tragedy to which he subscribed.

The same was not true of John Ford, who may justifiably be called the last of the great Renaissance tragedians. His revenge tragedies – *The Broken Heart*, *Love's Sacrifice*, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, all published in 1633 – are certainly as contrived as those of Shirley, but they possess an artistic and a moral daring that Shirley never dreamed of. Not content simply to work within the parameters of tragedy defined by Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, Ford set out to discover new heaven, new earth; and though he regularly mined the plays of his forebears, particularly Shakespeare, for plots, he did so with the understanding that only original moral premises – the shock of breaking already permissive social codes – could revitalize the genre.

'Tis Pity illustrates this strategy best. From the outset, Ford consciously advertises his debt to *Romeo and Juliet*: attractive young lovers, Giovanni and Annabella, are advised by their two mentors, a friar and a nurse, to deny their love or to keep it hidden from the eyes of a censorious society, and the play moves inexorably to Annabella's marriage to Soranzo, a man

she does not love, and to her murder and Giovanni's suicide. This much is derivative; but Ford gives it new life by revealing that the lovers are in fact brother and sister. Unlike Romeo and Juliet, this incestuous pair consummate their love early: the dramatic consequences of their doing so – her pregnancy and subsequent marriage of convenience, her husband's discovery of the deception, and his revenge on her – all take the play into territory more corrupt and sexually overheated than any charted by Shakespeare. It has been commonplace, therefore, for critics to regard Ford as a purveyor of Caroline decadence who appealed to his audience's taste for the merely sensational. His dramatic power, however, resides not in sensationalism, but in the iconoclasm of his moral sympathies; for in a world of jaded self-interest such as Ford creates, where adultery flourishes, revenge is commonplace, and even the cardinal makes no pretence to morality, the love of Giovanni and Annabella stands as something finer, nobler, and more passionate than anything those around them are capable of.

In drama of this period, incest served as 'a vehicle for the expression of illicit desire, a challenge to the fundamental conventions of society';¹¹ but where Webster in *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1613) had used it as a metaphor for moral decay and Beaumont and Fletcher in *A King and No King* (c. 1611) as an excuse for prurience, Ford treated it more imaginatively as the basis for a new morality – for a sublime defiance of social respectability. Arguing the case for incest with the incredulous friar, Giovanni essentially becomes a law unto himself. The sexual taboo is also a religious taboo, and its violation marks him as an atheist as well as a criminal. Yet Ford allows us to admire Giovanni much as we admire the Marlovian overreacher, as one whose assertion of individual will towers heroically above the carping of those petty poseurs who populate his world; and the verse in which he and Annabella express their love and their suffering, by refashioning the language of Romeo and Juliet, breathes new pathos into tired Petrarchanism:

GIOVANNI

Kiss me; if ever after-times should hear
Of our fast-knit affections, though perhaps
The laws of conscience and of civil use
May justly blame us, yet when they but know
Our loves, that love will wipe away that rigour
Which would in other incests be abhorred.
Give me your hand; how sweetly life doth run

¹¹ Leggatt, *English Drama: Shakespeare to the Restoration, 1590–1660* (London, 1988), p. 229. David M. Bergeron, too, discusses the incest of *'Tis Pity* in the light of dramatic precedent in 'Brother–sister relationships in Ford's 1633 plays' in Anderson, 'Concord in Discord', pp. 195–219.

In these well-coloured veins! how constantly
These palms do promise health! but I could chide
With Nature for this cunning flattery.
Kiss me again – forgive me.

ANNABELLA

With my heart.

GIOVANNI

Farewell.

ANNABELLA

With my heart.

GIOVANNI

Be dark, bright sun,
And make this midday night, that thy gilt rays
May not behold a deed will turn their splendour
More sooty than the poets feign their Styx!
One other kiss, my sister.

ANNABELLA

What means this?

GIOVANNI

To save thy fame, and kill thee in a kiss.

(5.5.68–84)

Next to such limpid beauty as this, the judgements of those hypocrites who condemn the lovers seem mean-spirited. Ford thus challenges conventional morality where others, like Shirley, pandered to it. His artifice draws attention to the power of theatre to promote alternate systems of value; Shirley, in contrast, merely drew attention to his own cleverness. At his best, as in the climactic scene in which Giovanni enters bearing Annabella's heart on his dagger – a grotesque emblem of the self-sacrificing love he holds as truth – Ford writes with an aesthetic and moral potency unrivalled by any of his contemporaries.

The theatre takes stock of itself

Despite the common assumption that Caroline playwrights were a decadent lot, therefore, many were deeply concerned with questions of morality; and when, in the first years of Charles's reign, commissions for new plays all but dried up, playwrights grew understandably fearful that the theatre was losing its credibility as a cultural force. Thus they began to use plays as forums to debate – and justify – their own roles as social and moral arbiters. Massinger led the way: his concern with the power of theatre to instruct and reform reflects the precarious position of dramatists writing under a monarch who

had absolute authority over their profession and for a public often sceptical of theatrical enterprise. Massinger was particularly sensitive to the power of censorship, having felt the lash early in his career, and he attacked both censorship and patronage in *The Roman Actor*, performed in 1626, shortly after Charles came to the throne. Modelled on Jonson's *Sejanus* (1603) – itself the victim of censorship – and tellingly set in the lurid days of imperial Rome, Massinger's tragedy focuses on the relationship of Rome's leading actor, Paris, to those in political power: the emperor Domitian Caesar, his empress Domitia, and the consul Aretinus.

In the first act, Paris and his fellow players stand accused 'of treason, / As libellers against the state and Caesar' (1.3.33–4) and, more generally, of traducing persons of rank – accusations levelled against actors in Massinger's day, and a certain provocation to censorship. Paris' defence against these allegations is usually interpreted as Massinger's apology for the theatre. Briefly, he argues that theatre educates and ennobles; that its representations of virtue and vice inspire spectators to ethical behaviour, never to passion; and that it exposes to ridicule only character types, not individuals.¹²

Massinger subverts these arguments in three plays-within-the-play, however, and thereby betrays some ambivalence about the theatre's claim to be morally instructive. In the first one, Caesar commands Paris to reform the old miser Philargus by performing a play called *The Cure of Avarice*. Paris, alluding to *Hamlet*, claims that Philargus will 'see his own deformity . . . as in a mirror . . . and loathe it' (2.1.97–9); but he fails to substantiate his claim. Philargus is unmoved by the play and consequently is put to death by the emperor for resisting correction. Tyranny gets results where the theatre cannot. The empress Domitia then commands Paris to perform a second play, based on a sensational Ovidian tale, just so that she may watch him enact the role of a lover. His performance so heightens her lust for him that she loses control of herself and disrupts the play. So much for Paris' claim that the theatre leads spectators to virtue.

Massinger subverts Paris' defence even more devastatingly in the third play, entitled *The False Servant*, which the emperor requests after discovering Paris in the arms of Domitia. Paris of course plays the title role, and Caesar casts himself as the wronged husband. But he forgets his lines in mid-performance and, incited to revenge, murders Paris on stage – an imitation of the famous catastrophe of Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*. With an irony

¹² Jonas Barish notes that Paris' arguments are indebted to Elizabethan apologists – Sidney, Nashe, Heywood, and Jonson – in 'Three Caroline "Defenses" of the stage' in Braunmuller and Bulman, eds. *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, p. 196.

by which Massinger underscores the precariousness of his profession in a despotic state, the emperor declares,

'twas my study
To make thy end more glorious to distinguish
My Paris from all others . . .

'twas my plot that thou
Shouldst die in action, and to crown it die
With an applause enduring to all times,
By our imperial hand. (4.2.290–2, 297–300)

Caesar thus conceives of the court as a private theatre where he can act any role to impose his absolute will. Massinger reinforces the point by having him invoke the spirit of a notorious ancestor who conceived of Rome as one big stage: 'since Nero scorned not / The public theatre, we in private may/ Disport ourselves' (4.2.2 24–6). At least inferentially, *The Roman Actor* criticizes the Caroline court's tendency to dramatize itself, to use theatrical self-fashioning as an instrument of power and persuasion. According to Annabel Patterson, the histrionic excesses of the King and Queen were becoming a matter of common gossip;¹³ and just a few years later William Prynne, in his virulently anti-theatrical tract *Histrionmastix* (1633), made the identification of Charles with the play-acting Roman tyrants, especially Nero, explicit.

The Roman Actor ushered in the defensive spirit of Caroline drama. It was the first among several plays to take theatre as its subject; collectively, they provide evidence that the theatre was suffering a crisis of identity in which dramatists asserted their power to influence an audience while in fact fearing their own impotence. Massinger resorted to the artifices of Elizabethan revenge tragedy to make his point. Others addressed the subject by recreating the wishful world of Elizabethan romance – a world of mythic metamorphoses and miraculous conversions. In his tragicomedy *The Lover's Melancholy* (1628), Ford tests the power of theatre to effect psychological cures in a manner reminiscent of Shakespeare's late romances.

In the play's parallel plots, the borrowing from Shakespeare is shameless. Both plots hinge on melancholy. One concerns Prince Palador of Cyprus, an Orsino-figure who has ignored all the duties of a monarch and lapsed into indolence since the disappearance of his beloved Eroclea, a virgin who had been wooed surreptitiously by Palador's licentious and tyrannical father Agenor, now dead. The other concerns Eroclea's aged father Meleander who, like King Lear, has fallen into a violent madness since Agenor robbed him

¹³ *Censorship and Interpretation* (Madison, Wis., 1984), p. 91. See also Goldberg, *James I*, pp. 203–9.

of his daughter, lands, and title. The action focuses on the cure of their melancholy made possible by Eroclea's return from exile disguised as a boy – a clear imitation of Viola's cross-dressing as Cesario.

Although Ford was undoubtedly influenced by Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), he was less interested in the power of medicine than in the power of theatre to minister to a mind diseased.¹⁴ Corax, the physician at Palador's court, is in fact a stage manager who speaks of his cures as an art; they can be achieved only through theatrical revelation. Ford thus focuses on the process of discovery, on poignant scenes of awakening and reconciliation, to dramatize those cures. To cure Palador, Corax stages a masque of melancholy with illustrative types drawn from Burton. Only the melancholic lover is left out: that role is assumed by Palador himself, who is, in a sense, drawn into the masque, the spectacle moving him to exorcise his own affliction. Theatrical artifice thus prepares him for a poignant reunion with Eroclea and for a resumption of his duties as monarch.

The cure of Meleander is theatrically more complex, for Corax must stage a scene to involve him without his knowing it. The old man is given a potion, and while asleep, he, like Lear, is dressed in new robes. Upon awakening, he is approached by three messengers from the prince, who ceremonially restore his honours, titles, and, in a picture, his daughter. The counterfeit prepares him for the entrance of Eroclea herself – nature here is handmaiden to art – and the scene is replete with echoes of Lear's reconciliation with Cordelia:

EROCLEA

[*Kneeling*] Dear sir, you know me?

MELEANDER

Yes, thou art my daughter,

My eldest blessing. Know thee? Why, Eroclea,

I never did forget thee in thy absence.

Poor soul, how dost?

EROCLEA

The best of my well-being

Consists in yours.

MELEANDER

Stand up; the gods, who hitherto

Have kept us both alive, preserve thee ever! (5.2.108-13)

Later in the scene, when Palador arrives to confirm all that the 'play' has promised, Meleander again echoes Lear: 'Great, gracious sir, alas, why do

¹⁴ For an astute analysis of Burton's limited influence on the play, see Michael Neill, 'The moral artifice of *The Lover's Melancholy*', *ELR* 8 (1978), 85-106.

you mock me? / I am a weak old man . . . ' (ll. 233–4). What Ford achieves with these allusions, however, is not the ethos of *Lear*, but rather a sentimental vision of social harmony controlled by the magic of art.

Ford is sometimes accused of not measuring up to the writers he imitates, but this misses the point. It is a fundamental misunderstanding of his plays to assume that they should explore themes already explored by Shakespeare – the self-discovery that comes with tragic suffering, or the shifts of gender and tests of love that make fifth-act couplings so richly earned. Instead, Ford transfigures Shakespearian material to advance his own ideas. In *The Lover's Melancholy*, he tests the claim that theatre has the power to reform the spectator, just as Massinger does in *The Cure of Avarice*; but where Massinger dramatizes the failure of the claim, Ford triumphantly dramatizes its success. He attributes to theatre an almost mythical power of persuasion. And although his politics are muted by the play's romantic affirmations, they are none the less clear: the theatrical self-fashioning abused by the imperial court in *The Roman Actor* becomes, in Palador's court, a force of political and social regeneration.

The conviction that theatrical illusion may be therapeutic informs Richard Brome's *The Antipodes* as well. Patterned in part on *The Lover's Melancholy*, this comedy was performed nearly a decade later, in 1638, when theatres had been closed by the plague for seventeen lean months and needed an affirmation of their own health. *The Antipodes* attests to the ethical function of theatre in contemporary London – the world of Jonsonian comedy, far from imperial Rome and romantic Cyprus. Brome learned his craft at Jonson's feet: his play is therefore stuffed with exaggerated characters and humorous incidents. It focuses on Peregrine, a melancholic young man from the country who, like Palador, is cured by means of stage magic.

An obsession with Mandeville's travels has prevented Peregrine from consummating his marriage of three years. His distressed father thus seeks out a house in London where a fantastical lord named Letoy, who keeps a troop of actors on hand, will take Peregrine on an imaginary journey to the Antipodes, where, presumably, he will learn to appreciate his own world by witnessing the world turned upside-down. The play's central conceit proclaims 'that upon the southern side of the globe manners and morals are exactly contrary to those upon the northern side';¹⁵ but ironically, what Antipodean scenes most often reveal is not an Anti-London, but a satirical distortion of London as it is. Brome no doubt depended on his audience to recognize in the Antipodes the topoi of city comedy: babbling lawyers, lecherous judges,

¹⁵ Ian Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down: Comedy from Jonson to Fielding* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 81–4.

hypocritical churchmen, corrupt statesmen, and unfaithful wives all come in for a drubbing. In fundamental ways, London and Anti-London are indistinguishable.

Like Palador and Meleander, Peregrine is cured by being drawn into the action, unwittingly becoming an actor in a fiction he cannot distinguish from reality. But Brome aims his satire more directly at those who can so distinguish – the aristocratic Londoners gathered at the Salisbury Court theatre. Brome offers *The Antipodes* as a funhouse mirror in which they may view the nature of their society. At the outset he makes clear that the audience for whom he intends his cure encompasses everyone in the theatre: ‘my house, which now / You may be pleased to call your own, is large / Enough to hold you all’ (I.I.I2–I4). To expel the plague that infects them, he recommends a doctor who administers

medicine of the mind, which he infuses
So skilfully, yet by familiar ways,
That it begets both wonder and delight
In his observers, while the stupid patient
Finds health at unawares. (24–8)

Brome here invokes a popular theory of comic catharsis.¹⁶ Comedy may purge an audience of its folly through wonder and delight; the metaphor is medicinal, and Brome the doctor. A more subversive writer than Ford or even Massinger, he affirms that theatre *has* a social function. Through all its absurdities, *The Antipodes* insists that comedy can reform the spectator – morally and politically.

Throughout the Caroline period, therefore, dramatists were intensely preoccupied with the ideological implications of theatre. Threats of court censorship, a shrinking of audiences, and a growing opposition to the theatre among more zealous puritans made dramatists sensible of the precariousness of a livelihood they had once taken for granted; and in their plays, consequently, theatrical self-reference took a decidedly introspective turn. Massinger was sceptical that theatre had *any* salutary power. His *Roman Actor*, written at the juncture of two oppressive reigns, dramatizes a theatre that has become a social liability: actors are sycophantic, their performances rouse spectators to immoral behaviour, and the stage is co-opted by a tyrannical court. Paris’ old-fashioned, platitudinous defences lie bleeding on the field.

¹⁶ See for example its use in Jonson’s comedy of humours. The medicinal idea of comic catharsis is discussed by Donaldson, *The World Upside-Down*, pp. 94–7, and by J. L. Davis, ‘Richard Brome’s neglected contribution to comic theory’, *SP* 11 (1948), 520–8.

Subsequent dramatists, Ford and Brome among them, tried to revive those stricken defences by dramatizing the power of theatre to ‘cure’ spectators – to reform them for ethical ends. But their plays lack the political urgency of Massinger’s and resort either to romantic fantasy or to farce. In fictions that bore no relation to the actual condition of theatre during this period, dramatists strained to affirm their value to a society that was growing increasingly suspicious of them. As witness to this, one marks in their plays nostalgic references to, even recreations of, plays of an earlier generation – *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Lear*, Jonsonian city comedy. Through such nostalgic reference, Caroline dramatists perhaps hoped to stem the tide of dissent: their plays, each in its own way a defence, imagine societies redeemed by theatrical enterprise from the process of political and social disruption. But that process eventually proved unstoppable, hurled England into civil war, and rendered all such defences nugatory.

Jonson and his legacy

In his early comedies of humours, Ben Jonson had been a strong apologist for the theatre, arguing its essentially moral function. Not surprisingly, then, Caroline dramatists turned to the models he had provided: no writer influenced the development of Caroline comedy more strongly than Jonson. Yet there is a paradox here, for Jonson’s Caroline plays were themselves unpopular, and his Jacobean comedies dramatized a moral ambiguity and social fragmentation that unsettled Caroline audiences. His theory of humours revealed scepticism that human nature could change as a result of experience, and his satirical depiction of urban folly excluded the harmony, forgiveness, and social unity that characterized Elizabethan comedy. Jonson’s obsession with rapacity and his portrayal of London low-life – the bawds and pimps, parasites and cheats who were the natural offspring of bourgeois commercialism – did not always appeal to a more refined Caroline audience. Nevertheless, his comedies inspired many of the best Caroline dramatists to try their hand at city comedy. If those dramatists preferred to deal with more aristocratic types than Jonson, to blunt the point of his satire, and to soften his moral indictment of urban society, they none the less borrowed liberally from his plots and adapted them to social concerns of their own age.

Shackerly Marmion’s fine comedy *Holland’s Leaguer* (1631) illustrates how Jonson’s muse was modified for an audience as interested in manners as in morals. The plot involves the gulling of two young men – a humorous gallant named Trimalchio, who has recently squandered his father’s estate, and his protégé Capritio, who has come from Norfolk to learn the manners of the town. Marmion’s focus on newcomers reflects the enormous growth

in population London had undergone, and in particular the movement of country gentry to the town. From a decidedly courtly perspective, Marmion ridicules the naïvety of these fashion-mongers: Trimalchio is a dissolute precursor of Sir Fopling Flutter, and Capritio a country dolt who would make Margery Pinchwife look sophisticated.

Like Jonson, Marmion satirizes London types (in the impostor Agurtes and his disciple Captain Autolicus, for instance); but unlike him, he draws those types not from the bourgeoisie, but from the privileged classes. With Jonsonian wit, he indicts the materialism of his society, mocks the aspirations of the gentry, and exposes the immorality of cavaliers; but in un-Jonsonian fashion, he balances the satire with an ennobling romantic plot wherein the narcissistic Lord Philautus is converted to virtue by the first woman he cannot seduce. Because this woman is actually his sister Faustina, whom he (preposterously) fails to recognize, his attempt to seduce her is rife with Fletcherian possibilities; but Marmion chooses not to exploit them. Instead, he dramatizes the power of platonic love to transform human nature. 'For how can that be love', Faustina asks her lecherous brother,

which seeks the ruin
Of his own object, and the thing beloved?
No, true love is pure affection,
That gives the soul transparent, and not that
That's conversant in beastly appetites.

(3.4, p. 59)

That Philautus is a lord is significant, for, as Faustina implies (just as Julietta would suggest to Lord Bonville in *Hyde Park* a year later), the nobility ought to set a moral tone for the whole society. Philautus's imprisonment by self-love may thus be symptomatic of an entire class that had forsaken its moral responsibility and become the source of vanity in others, such as the aspirant courtiers Trimalchio and Capritio. His conversion at the hands of a chaste woman, furthermore, may pay tribute to Queen Henrietta who, by promoting neoplatonic idealism (see pp. 366–8), was attempting to educate courtiers to virtue.

Other dramatists, less courtly in orientation, attempted to show the emerging *beau monde* of London its own image 'in parks, squares, taverns and gaming houses, supplying standards against which forms and codes of behaviour could be established, scrutinized and adjusted'.¹⁷ Their plays thus served an important social function and may rightly be called 'town' rather than 'city' comedies. *Hyde Park* is one example; Thomas Nabbes's *Covent*

¹⁷ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. III.

Garden is another. Brome, however, was the foremost writer of such plays, and *The Weeding of Covent Garden* (1632?), like his later *Antipodes*, reveals how successfully he applied Jonson's techniques to an essentially un-Jonsonian world.

Inspired in part by *Bartholomew Fair*, *The Weeding* concerns the settling of country gentry into the newly fashionable Covent Garden district, a place which a local justice (descended from Jonson's Adam Overdo) and a humorous country gentleman named Crosswill fail to weed of those roisterers and whores with whom Crosswill's wilful children fraternize. Brome creates a comic image of the chaos that results when too many arbitrary laws, such as those by which Charles attempted to control England's economic and social life, compete with one another.¹⁸ But whether or not one reads it as a political allegory, *The Weeding* is clearly concerned with social adjustment in London, and in particular with inhabitants of the town and their values: how they govern themselves, how they allow themselves to be governed. Brome portrays a wider social spectrum than Shirley, Marmion, and Davenant do. Where they confine themselves largely to the aristocracy, Brome ranges from the gentry to the bourgeoisie to the underclasses and outlaws, thereby capturing something of the confusion of Ursula's stall at Bartholomew Fair. His encompassing social vision harks back to Jonson and makes this play, in tone and style, a true descendant of Jacobean comedy.

Similar concerns with social adjustment inform Davenant's popular comedy *The Wits* (1634), in which a country gentleman named Pallatine the Elder and a humorous older knight named Thwack, having put their estates in trust, come to London vowing to live off their wits – by which they mean to live off women and thereby prove their mastery of town arts. The main plot involves the gulling of Pallatine the Elder by the witty Lady Ample and by his younger brother, whom necessity has already taught to master such arts; and for this plot, Davenant refashions the central situation of *The Alchemist* to satirize aristocratic manners rather than commercial chicanery. Lady Ample is a wealthy ward of the absent Sir Tyrant Thrift, whose house she uses as a place to humiliate the elder Pallatine into acknowledging the superior wit of women. She schemes with the younger Pallatine to lead his brother naked into a bed where, instead of receiving the expected gratification, he is arrested as a male bawd; later, when he is pressing his suit, she causes him to hide in a chest by telling him that Thrift has unexpectedly returned. He is freed from the chest only after deeding a country manor to his brother – an inheritance younger brothers could never legitimately claim.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 151–8.

The Wits, however cynical, is more benign than *The Alchemist* in its depiction of social relations. Pallatine the Elder recognizes the folly of his plans, acknowledges the superior wit of his brother and Lady Ample, and, in return, is given the lady's hand in marriage. The tones of feminism may be heard distinctly in her refusal to submit to male domination:

But, sir, if I should marry you, it is
In confidence, I have the better wit,
And can subdue you still to quietness,
Meek sufferings, and patient awe.

(5.3, p. 220)

Thrift, as a result of this marriage, is done out of the inheritance he had hoped to gain by marrying his ward; and in an act of splendid generosity, Thwack, who is childless, makes the younger Pallatine his heir. Social harmony is thus assured. As in the best Elizabethan comedy, Jack has Jill and nought goes ill.

The social premises of *The Wits*, however, resemble those of *The Weeding of Covent Garden* more than Elizabethan comedy. Davenant, like Brome, dramatizes the consequences of the movement of country gentry to the town, but, unlike Brome, he implies that life in town may be unsuitable for those who fail to live by their wits. Chastened by the gulling, Thwack decides to write letters 'down to th' country, to dehort [dissuade] / The gentry from coming hither, letters / Of strange dire news' (4.2, p. 199); the dire news includes satire on puritanism, on drinking and abstention, and on the dissipation at Covent Garden. Thwack's letters comically recall Charles's proclamation of 30 June 1632 'commanding the gentry to keep their residences at their mansions in the country, and forbidding them to make their habitations in London and places adjoining'¹⁹ (a proclamation Crosswill had flouted in *The Weeding*), and the action of the play affirms its validity: the country is a more fitting place for old-fashioned gentry like Thwack to live and govern, though for reasons quite different from those Charles set out in his decree.²⁰ Despite Thwack's satirical attack on the town, however, Davenant suggests that town and country are complementary rather than opposed. The country, portrayed in pastoral terms, is England's backbone, the seat of traditional values, and in it those gentry who have estates to manage – men of substance – rightly belong. In town, on the other hand, good sense can make a living and even thrive: the town is an appropriate place for younger brothers and others without estates to inherit. This view of the proper relationship between country and town is perfectly in keeping with

¹⁹ Kaufmann, *Richard Brome*, p. 69.

²⁰ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, p. 144.

the court's, and it marks Davenant, more than Jonson's other imitators, as a royalist.

While Jonson's Jacobean comedies were widely imitated, his Caroline plays – *The Staple of News* (1626), *The New Inn* (1629), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), *The Tale of a Tub* (1633) – were paradoxically unpopular in their own day, dismissed as 'dotages' by Dryden, and even today are regarded as products of a dramatist in decline. True, Jonson had seen better days: he had suffered a paralysing stroke in 1628, he had not found the favour in Charles's court that he had found in James's, and his vigorously English comedy did not appeal to the increasingly Europeanized audience that flocked to revivals of Beaumont and Fletcher. Jonson confronted the situation with characteristic perversity. While more fashionable writers refined his comic muse to accommodate the manners of court and town, Jonson himself turned anomalously to an unfashionable genre, that of Shakespearian romance, for his best Caroline play.

Though a failure when first performed in 1629, *The New Inn* clearly is no dotage. Its nostalgic vision of an Elizabethan social order may not have interested the Caroline audience, but as society under the Stuarts fell (or seemed to fall) further and further away from the ideals of Elizabeth's golden age, Jonson came to feel a kinship with the great writer whose romantic comedies awakened the imagination to the power of love and forgiveness.²¹ In *The New Inn*, romance is tamed to a suburban setting. Shakespeare's green world becomes the Inn of the Light Heart in Barnet, to which aristocrats from the city repair to undergo their metamorphoses. Chief among them are Lord Lovel, a melancholic who pines for the love of Lady Frampul, and the lady herself, a professional virgin who arrives for an afternoon of courtly games, involves Lovel in them, and loses her heart to him.

Jonson frames this courtly-love play in a plot so full of coincidences that Shakespeare himself could not have matched its absurdity. Indeed, it is possible to interpret the plot as an irreverent parody of the romantic falsehoods Jonson once had deplored.²² Goodstock, the well-spoken host of the Light

²¹ Anne Barton discusses Caroline nostalgia for things Elizabethan, and accounts for the impact of Shakespeare's First Folio (1623) on Jonson's Caroline plays, in 'Harking back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline nostalgia', *ELH* 48 (1981), 706–31. See also John Lemly's essay on Jonson's use of Shakespearian elements in his late plays, "'Make odde discoveries!'" Disguises, masques, and Jonsonian romance' in Braunmuller and Bulman, eds., *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, pp. 131–47.

²² See for example Larry S. Champion, *Ben Jonson's 'Dotages': A Reconsideration of the Late Plays* (Lexington, Ky., 1967), pp. 76–103, who regards the play as an abortive court satire, and Watson, *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy*, pp. 210–25, who argues that Jonson treads a fine line between earnestness and send-up.



24 John Caird's 1987 Royal Shakespeare Company production of Jonson's *The New Inn*, Swan Theatre

Heart (as out of place there as Duke Senior in the Forest of Arden), is none other than Lord Frampul, the lady's father, who years earlier deserted his wife and two young daughters and now, in penance, has 'confined' himself in the inn. The boy Frank who works there is, unbeknown to him, his second daughter Laetitia. In a humorous situation beholden to *Twelfth Night*, Lady Frampul dresses 'Frank' in sport as her own lost sister to deceive Lord Beaufort, who promptly falls in love with her. Even more absurdly, the Irish nurse who abducted Laetitia and brought her in disguise to the inn turns out to be her own mother, Lord Frampul's wife. These fifth-act revelations have the effect of 'a poignant wish-dream' in which the main focus, as in Shakespeare's romances, is on family reunion:²³ missing children return as from the dead, spouses are reconciled after years of separation, disguises are shed, each daughter is matched with a suitable husband, and Frampul himself, like a suburban Prospero, ends his revels.

Jonson's adoption of Shakespeare's romantic patterns does not mean he had abandoned moral comedy. On the contrary, he used romance to criticize and to counter those forces that had disrupted the family in Caroline England. 'The transfer of power and wealth from country estate to urban institution had hastened the separation of families', and great households no longer served as centres of familial, economic, and political life as they had

²³ Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 281.

done during Elizabeth's reign.²⁴ The Inn of the Light Heart itself is a place for unfulfilled people to congregate without making serious commitments to one another or to life. It is, in a sense, a sterile inversion of Penshurst, the Sidney family estate Jonson had once idealized; but in the 'odd discoveries' made there, Jonson miraculously converts the new inn into a place where old virtues may be reclaimed.

Goodstock and Lovel, who share the perspective of years, lament the passing of a better age. Together they indict the morality of Stuart courtiers, who make a fetish of form but scoff at the ideals that once gave form a purpose. When Lovel, for example, elegiacally extols the virtues of a chivalric education at court, Goodstock replies:

Aye, that was when the nursery's self was noble,
And only virtue made it, not the market,
That titles were not vented at the drum
Or common outcry; goodness gave the greatness,
And greatness worship: every house became
An academy of honour, and those parts –
We see departed, in the practice, now,
Quite from the institution. (1.3.52–9)

Among the current practices at court – the 'seven liberal deadly sciences / Of pagery' (82–3) – Goodstock particularly rails against sexual promiscuity, gambling, and false honour: his invective echoes that of Jonson's earlier malcontents. Furthermore, the satire of court morality finds more comic expression below-stairs, where a motley militia drawn in the style of Jonsonian humours comedy – Colonel Glorious, Bat Burst, Hodge Huffle, a drawer, tapster, chamberlain, ostler, and others – drink, brag, abuse a lady, and ride roughshod over civilized values. By using low comedy to mirror the main plot, Jonson shows himself to be still the master of Jacobean comic form.

The cult of neoplatonism

The New Inn focuses on a court of love that Lady Frampul holds for an afternoon's entertainment. In it, Lovel is given the chance to win the lady's affection in sport by discoursing on platonic love. His speeches, riveting testimonials to an enduring ideal, pay homage to the neoplatonic conceits of Donne's great love poetry. Love, he says, stamps the idea of the beloved on

²⁴ See Michael Hattaway's edition of *The New Inn* (Manchester, 1984), Introduction, pp. 5–6.

oneself; minds, like glasses, reflect the form of the beloved; love is a spiritual coupling of souls. And like Donne, Lovel argues his point in legal fashion against those who would defend the superiority of carnal desire:

The body's love is frail, subject to change,
And alters still, with it: the mind's is firm,
One, and the same, proceedeth first from weighing
And well examining what is fair and good;
Then, what is like in reason, fit in manners;
That breeds good will: good will desire of union.

(3.2.157–62)

Such sentiments crop up in later comedies as well, as we have seen in *Holland's Leaguer*; they anticipate the neoplatonic idealism fostered at court in the 1630s by Henrietta Maria. Her neoplatonism was a serious attempt to reform the behaviour of courtiers. Indeed, as Stephen Orgel and Roy Strong suggest, it was a political assertion as well, tied to Charles's claim of absolute monarchy: 'About the Queen revolved all passion, controlled and idealized by her Platonic beauty and virtue, as about the King all intellect and will'.²⁵ Jonson was equally serious about neoplatonism and, like the Queen, saw it as a way to subdue immorality. Two years after *The New Inn*, he glorified its sublime idealism in two court masques; and although *The New Inn* was written before the neoplatonic cult had fully blossomed, it none the less demonstrates that in ethical commitment, if not in theatrical taste, Jonson was at one with the court.

From the beginning of her reign, Henrietta Maria had striven to allegorize the court in terms of pastoral romance. Interest in Sidney's *Arcadia* revived, and various plays and masques celebrated the court's neoplatonism by finding sources in French pastoral romances such as Honoré d'Urfé's *Astrée*, a work to which Jonson alludes in *The New Inn* (3.2.205). A new production of Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess* in 1634 revealed the Queen's determination to promote her own interests through the theatre. At her request, this Jacobean satire on sexual licence was essentially reinvented as a Caroline idyll, a celebration of chastity. That the play had been 'misinterpreted' and thus failed in 1608 but succeeded in 1634 was seen, according to Annabel Patterson, as 'simultaneously an indictment of the earlier age' and 'a proof of the new court's finer morals and esthetics'.²⁶

²⁵ Inigo Jones: *The Theatre of the Stuart Court* (London, 1973), 1.55, and see chapter 4, 'Platonic politics', pp. 49–75, *passim*.

²⁶ *Censorship and Interpretation*, p. 173.

As with any cult, however, the Queen's cult of neoplatonism was eventually trivialized and travestied. It seemed to its critics both frivolous and immoral, a smokescreen for the behaviour it was attempting to eradicate. The very phrase 'platonic love' became a code for elaborate games of amorous intrigue and adultery, the kind of illicit love for which the Cavalier court is now remembered.²⁷ Even courtly writers acknowledged the tension between the ideal and the practice. Davenant, for example, in his masque *The Temple of Love* (1635) and in his tragicomedy *The Platonic Lovers* (1636), celebrated the neoplatonism of the royal couple while gently parodying its hypocrisy as practised by courtiers. However, in the work of less polished dramatists – those amateurs who hovered about the Queen – the course of the cult can most clearly be traced.

Thomas Killigrew is a case in point. An impecunious courtier who attached himself to the Queen's circle, Killigrew produced between 1635 and 1637 three tragicomedies which catered to the court's taste for chivalric romance, replete with exotic contests of love and honour. All three had a common source in *Ariane*, a heroic romance published at Paris in 1632 and in vogue with the platonic *précieux* at both the French and the English courts. By the end of the decade, however, Killigrew felt free to write a ribald comedy of manners called *The Parson's Wedding* – in part a spoof on the artificial idealism of his earlier plays – without fear of incurring the court's displeasure. In it, two witty and fortune-hunting gallants plot to win an attractive young widow and her friend away from the dull platonic lovers who assiduously woo them. Battle lines are drawn on the field of platonic love: the ladies defend the ideals of such love even though they are bored by their hypocritical wooers' pledges of constant service, and the gallants attack 'the spiritual nonsense the age calls Platonic love', even though, at the end, they submit to the conventions of marriage.²⁸

This play is, decidedly, Cavalier drama. Killigrew directs his satire against Parliament and political reform, against dissenting clergy and religious agitators, against the military, against creditors. The gallants themselves, like Cavaliers of the period, are prototypes for the rakes of Restoration comedy, and the heroines differ from Restoration heroines only in so far as they are not yet fully emancipated from the assumptions of neoplatonism. Although written about 1640, *The Parson's Wedding* was probably not performed until after the Restoration, when, as acted by Killigrew's company, it proved popular with the coterie audience. The audience of that time was far more

²⁷ On the trivialization of the cult of platonic love, see Barton, *Ben Jonson*, pp. 264–5, and Hattaway, *The New Inn*, Introduction, pp. 31–3.

²⁸ James C. Bulman, 'Thomas Killigrew', *Dictionary of Literary Biography* 58, 123–31.

homogeneous than Caroline audiences had been, and it was symptomatic of such homogeneity that when the theatres reopened in 1660, Davenant and Killigrew – two Cavalier dramatists, both former members of the Queen's circle – were granted exclusive patents to form rival companies. As managers, they helped to shape a repertory more élitist and limited in appeal than England had yet known.

Caroline drama was once regarded as the precursor of Restoration drama, an enervated, immoral body of work appealing to a uniformly Cavalier audience; and in the plays of Davenant and Killigrew we can perhaps find justification for this view. But clearly the situation is more complex. Other, greater dramatists – Massinger, Ford, Shirley, Jonson, Brome – wrote for audiences much more varied, of heterogeneous social and political views, even if alike in privilege. True, these dramatists largely ignored the public theatres and thus may not be considered popular in the way that Shakespeare was, or other Elizabethans whose plays they imitated: Caroline drama was, after all, self-consciously derivative, concerned with artifice, manners, codes of behaviour. But in so far as it anatomized the tensions within an increasingly strained society, it caught the spirit of the Caroline moment; by dramatizing in copious detail the pressures arising from social difference, it helped to shape the self-consciousness of a politically diverse audience. Like the better-known drama of preceding generations, Caroline drama was a reflection on, as well as of, its age.

Bibliography

Social issues in Caroline drama

Criticism during the past two decades has demonstrated Caroline drama's lively involvement in social issues of the age. Two books have been particularly influential: Margot Heinemann's *Puritanism and Theatre* (1980) and Martin Butler's indispensable study of *Theatre and Crisis: 1632–1642* (1984). Annabel Patterson's *Censorship and Interpretation* (1984) and portions of Jonathan Goldberg's *James I and the Politics of Literature* (1983) also have focused attention on plays traditionally regarded as the inferior offspring of worthy Elizabethan and Jacobean parents; and these works have influenced more recent studies such as Albert Tricomi's *Anticourt Drama in England, 1603–42* (1989) and N. W. Bawcutt's *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama*, an edition of the records of Sir Henry Herbert who served as Master of the Revels (1996). Two further studies have focused on the waning of Caroline drama during the Commonwealth: Dale Randall, *Winter Fruit: English Drama 1642–1660* (1995), and Susan Wiseman, *Drama and Politics in the English Civil War* (1998).

Ford and Massinger

Ford and Massinger in particular have benefited from this renewed interest in the Caroline period. In *Philip Massinger: A Critical Reassessment*, ed. Douglas Howard (1985), contributors cover a wide range of topics, from Massinger's use of theatrical language (Colin Gibson) to his treatment of gender (Philip Edwards), from his political tragedies (Martin Butler) to the social order of his comedies (Michael Neill). Massinger's work is also the subject of several essays in *Comedy from Shakespeare to Sheridan*, ed. A. R. Braunmuller and J. C. Bulman (1986), of which Gail Paster's exploration of Middleton's influence on Massinger, Philip Edwards's of Massinger's comical histories, and Jonas Barish's of Caroline defences of the theatre are especially illuminating. More recently, Ira Clark has devoted an entire book to *The Moral Art of Philip Massinger* (1993), and Martin Garrett has edited *Massinger: The Critical Heritage* (1991).

Ford, like Massinger, is the subject of an important anthology – '*Concord in Discord*': *The Plays of John Ford, 1586–1986*, ed. Donald K. Anderson (1986) – in which Robert Heilman, Eugene M. Waith, Alan Dessen, David Bergeron, and others provide an eclectic summation of the best in traditional approaches to Ford's work. Focusing with particular clarity on aesthetic and moral evaluations, they build on earlier studies such as Mark Stavig's *John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order* (1968) and Ronald Huebert's *John Ford: Baroque English Dramatist* (1977) without essentially challenging them. Dorothy M. Farr's *John Ford and the Caroline Theatre* (1979), however, has more materialist concerns: Farr considers Ford's plays in the light of the venues (Blackfriars, Phoenix) for which they were written and the audiences for which they were performed. Likewise, Lisa Hopkins continues the historicist exploration first undertaken by Heinemann and Butler in her assessment of *John Ford's Political Theatre* (1994).

Jonson, Davenant, and the rest

During the 1980s, Jonson's Caroline plays were re-evaluated in three important books: Alexander Leggatt's *Ben Jonson: His Vision and His Art* (1981), Anne Barton's *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (1984), and Robert N. Watson's *Ben Jonson's Parodic Strategy: Literary Imperialism in the Comedies* (1987). Since then, at least a half dozen essays have appeared on *The New Inn* alone. Perhaps more surprising than this resurgent interest in Jonson's late plays has been the attention accorded William Davenant, older studies of whom, such as Alfred Harbage's *Sir William Davenant, Poet Venturer 1606–1668* (1935) and Arthur H. Nethercot's *Sir William D'Avenant, Poet Laureate and*

Playwright-Manager (1938), have been supplanted by Philip Bordinat and Sophia Blaydes's *Sir William Davenant* (1981) and Mary Edmond's *Rare Sir William Davenant* (1987).

Surprisingly little work has been forthcoming on other major Caroline writers – Shirley and Brome in particular – as well as on lesser lights such as Marmion and Killigrew. Two general works about Caroline drama have devoted chapters to Shirley and Brome without rekindling the serious interest these great writers deserve: Ira Clark's *Professional Playwrights: Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and Brome* (1992) and Julie Sanders's slight *Caroline Drama: The Plays of Massinger, Ford, Shirley and Brome* (1999). Essays on individual plays are scarce, with Brome's *The Jovial Crew* virtually alone in being treated more than once. An important study of entertainments at the court of Queen Henrietta Maria, Erica Veevers's *Images of Love and Religion* (1989), helps to contextualize responses to the cult of neoplatonism in drama of the 1630s.

Texts

I have quoted from the following editions of particular plays: the Revels editions of Ford's *The Lover's Melancholy*, ed. R. F. Hill (1985) and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, ed. Derek Roper (1975); the Regents' Renaissance Drama editions of Brome's *The Antipodes*, ed. Ann Haaker (1966) and Shirley's *The Traitor*, ed. John Stewart Carter (1965); and the Garland Renaissance Drama edition of Brome's *The Weeding of Covent Garden*, ed. Donald S. McClure (1980).

BIOGRAPHIES AND SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Reference works and bibliographies
2. General critical studies, theatre studies, and collections of criticism
3. Masques, pageants, academic and folk drama, etc.
4. Selected biographical sources
5. Biographies and bibliographies of individual authors

In the bio-bibliographies of individual authors, we have tried to list at least one modern collected edition of play texts, even if 'modern' means Victorian (and possibly unreliable), along with a short list of critical studies. Essays and books principally devoted to biography, bibliographical matters, or source study have not been included, nor have editions of individual plays when a standard collected edition, however inferior, exists. Many of the titles in the 'General critical studies...' section devote individual chapters or sections to single plays or playwrights; these titles are usually not repeated under the entries for individual authors. The bibliographies to individual chapters above include relevant titles not mentioned here. Non-dramatic works are generally not listed in the bibliographies. Abbreviated periodical titles are listed at the beginning of this volume.

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5. Biographies and bibliographies of individual authors

Beaumont, Francis (1584/5–1616)

Born Grace-Dieu, Leicestershire, third son of Justice Francis Beaumont. Entered Broadgates Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford, 1597 at age twelve. Entered Inner Temple 1600. Friendly with Jonson and Drayton. Wrote *The Woman Hater* for Paul's Boys c. 1606 and *Knight of the Burning Pestle* c. 1607 for Blackfriars. Lived with Fletcher and with him wrote for Blackfriars, then King's Men and Queen's Revels Children 1606–13, producing at least seven joint plays, including *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, and *A King and No King*. Wrote masque for Princess Elizabeth's wedding, 14 February 1613. Ceased writing upon marriage to heiress Ursula Isley 1613. Died 6 March 1616, aged thirty-two. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

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- See also John Fletcher.

Biographies and select bibliography

Brome, Richard (c. 1590–1652/3)

Born c. 1590, apparently into a poor family. May have attended Eton. Earliest record of him is in 1614 as servant to Ben Jonson, who mentions him by name as the poet's 'man' in *Bartholomew Fair*. Wrote steadily throughout the 1620s and 30s for the King's Men at the Globe and Blackfriars and the Queen's at the Cockpit and Salisbury Court. Wrote for provincial companies during mid-1630s. Fifteen plays survive, primarily Jonsonian city comedies and romantic dramas. Lived in poverty for ten years after closing of theatres; known dead by 1653, when five of his plays were gathered for publication.

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Hirschfeld, Heather. 'Collaborating across generations: Thomas Heywood, Richard Brome, and the production of the *Late Lancashire Witches*'. *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000), 399–74.

Kaufmann, R. J. *Richard Brome, Caroline Playwright*. New York, 1961.

Sanders, Julie. *Caroline Drama: The Plays of Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and Brome*. Plymouth, 1999.

Shaw, Catherine. *Richard Brome*. Boston, Mass., 1980.

Spivack, Charlotte. 'Alienation and illusion: the play within a play on the Caroline stage'. *MARDIE* 4 (1989), 195–210.

Cartwright, William (1611–1643)

Born December 1611, Northway, near Tewkesbury, of a wealthy and educated family. King's Scholar at Westminster School. Entered Christ Church, Oxford, as a gentleman commoner in 1628, MA in 1635. Took orders, 1638. Author of four plays written as academic exercises for Oxford students, believed to have been performed at Christ Church, 1633–8. His *Royal Slave*, with music by Henry Lawes, was performed at Oxford before Charles I in 1636. Appointed Succentor of the church in Salisbury, October 1642; chosen junior proctor of Oxford the following year. Died Oxford, November 1643; buried in Christ Church cathedral.

Works:

Evans, G. Blakemore, ed. *Plays and Poems*. Madison, Wis., 1951.

Biographies and select bibliography

Study:

Davis, Joe Lee. *The Sons of Ben: Jonsonian Comedy in Caroline England*. Detroit, 1967.

Chapman, George (c. 1559–1634)

Born c. 1559, Hitchin, Hertfordshire. May have studied at Oxford and Cambridge; took no degree. In Europe, 1585–91; military service in Netherlands likely. On Henslowe's payroll as dramatist for Admiral's Men (1596–9), writing the earliest of numerous comedies and perhaps inventing 'the comedy of humours' with *An Humorous Day's Mirth* (1597). Completed Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* (1598). *Bussy D'Ambois*, produced by Paul's Boys c. 1604 and later revived by King's Men. Imprisoned with Jonson for his share in *Eastward Ho!* (Blackfriars, 1605), which offended James I. Soon in trouble again for offending the French ambassador with *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608). May have withdrawn from active playwriting c. 1612; concentrated on Homeric translations. Wrote a masque for Princess Elizabeth's wedding (1613). Patronized by Robert Carr, Earl of Somerset, as late as 1624–5. Mentioned by Meres as among the best for comedy, tragedy, and translations, and for having 'mightily enriched' the English tongue. Died 12 May 1634, in London. Buried in St Giles-in-the-Fields, with a monument erected by Inigo Jones.

Works:

Holaday, Allan, gen. ed. *The Plays of George Chapman: The Comedies*. Urbana, Ill., 1970.

The Plays of George Chapman: The Tragedies. Cambridge, 1987.

Parrott, T. M., ed. *The Plays and Poems of George Chapman*. 2 vols. London, *Comedies*, 1914, *Tragedies*, 1910. Reprinted, New York, 1961.

(attributed author) Raylor, Timothy. *The Essex House Masque of 1621: Viscount Doncaster and the Jacobean Masque*. Pittsburgh, 2000.

Studies:

Beach, Vincent W. *George Chapman: An Annotated Bibliography of Commentary and Criticism*. New York, 1995.

Bergson, Allen. 'The ironic tragedies of Marston and Chapman: notes on Jacobean tragic form'. *JEGP* 69 (1970), 613–30.

Bliss, Lee. 'The boys from Ephesus: farce, freedom, and limit in *The Widow's Tears*'. *RenD* n.s. 10 (1979), 161–83.

Braunmuller, A. R. *Natural Fictions: George Chapman's Major Tragedies*. Newark, Del., and London, 1990.

Burton, K. M. 'The political tragedies of Chapman and Ben Jonson'. *EIC* 2 (1952), 397–412.

Hibbard, G. R. 'Goodness and greatness: an essay on the tragedies of Ben Jonson and George Chapman'. *RMS* 11 (1968), 5–54.

Jacquot, Jean. *George Chapman, sa vie, sa poésie, son théâtre, sa pensée*. Paris, 1951.

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- Kreider, Paul V. *Elizabethan Comic Character Conventions as Revealed in the Comedies of George Chapman*. Ann Arbor, Mich., 1935.
- MacLure, Millar. *George Chapman: A Critical Study*. Toronto, 1966.
- Rees, Ennis. *The Tragedies of George Chapman: Renaissance Ethics in Action*. Cambridge, Mass., 1954.
- Spens, Janet. 'Chapman's ethical thought'. *E&S* 11 (1925), 145-69.
- Spivack, Charlotte. *George Chapman*. New York, 1967.
- Ure, Peter. 'The main outline of Chapman's Byron'. *SP* 47 (1950), 568-88.
- Waddington, Raymond B. 'Prometheus and Hercules: the dialectic of Bussy D'Ambois'. *ELH* 34 (1967), 21-48.
- Waith, Eugene M. *The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare and Dryden*. New York, 1962.

Chettle, Henry (1560-c. 1607)

Son of London dyer Robert Chettle. Apprenticed to stationer Thomas East, becoming a freeman of the Stationer's Company in 1584. Entered partnership in printing business with Danter and Hoskins from 1589 to 1591. Writing plays for Admiral's Men, both alone and in collaboration, 1598. Collaborated with Dekker and Haughton on *Patient Grissil*. Possibly died in plague of 1603; known dead by 1607. Credited by Henslowe with many plays (possibly more than fifty, alone or in collaboration), of which only *Tragedy of Hoffman* is extant. Active as satiric pamphleteer. Mentioned by Meres as 'among the best for comedy'.

Work:

- Jenkins, Harold, ed. *The Tragedy of Hoffman*. Malone Society Reprints. Oxford, 1951.

Studies:

- Brucher, Richard. 'Piracy and parody in Chettle's *Hoffman*'. *Ben Jonson Journal* 6 (1999), 209-22.
- Dean, Paul. 'Forms of time: some Elizabethan two-part history plays'. *Renaissance Studies* 4 (1990), 410-30.
- Jenkins, Harold. *The Life and Work of Chettle*. London, 1934.
- Jowett, John. "Notes on Henry Chettle," *RES* 45 (1994), 517-22.
- Shapiro, James. 'The Scot's tragedy and the politics of popular drama'. *ELR* 23 (1993), 428-49.

Daniel, Samuel (c. 1562-1619)

Born c. 1562, Somerset. Probably son of music-master John Daniel. Entered Magdalen Hall, Oxford, 1581; left without taking degree. By 1585 served as agent to Walsingham in France and, by 1592, entered the circle of Mary (Sidney), Countess of Pembroke; later patrons include Fulke Greville (q.v.), Charles Blount (Lord Mountjoy), and Lady Anne Clifford. Closet tragedy *Cleopatra* published 1594 and twice revised (1599, 1607). Composed *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, a masque,

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for James's new court in 1603, and *Tethys' Festival* for Prince of Wales's investiture (1610). Summoned before the Privy Council in 1605 for his tragedy *Philotas* (Queen's Revels), believed to defend Essex's rebellion; licenser of Queen's Revels (1604). Two pastoral tragicomedies (1605 and 1614), both performed for Queen's Privy Chamber. Died October 1619; buried on farm at Beckington, Somerset. Listed by Meres as among best for elegy and for having 'mightily enriched' the English tongue.

Works:

Grosart, Alexander B., ed. *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Samuel Daniel*. 5 vols. London, 1885–96.

Studies:

Gazzard, Hugh. "“Those grave presentments of antiquitie”: Samuel Daniel's *Philotas* and the Earl of Essex". *RES* 51 (2000), 423–50.

Godshalk, W. L. 'Recent studies in Samuel Daniel (1975–1990)'. *ELR* 24 (1994), 489–502.

Harner, James L. *Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton : A Reference Guide*. Boston, Mass., 1980.

Lawrence, Jason. "“The whole complection of Arcadia chang'd”: Samuel Daniel and Italian lyrical drama". *MARDIE* 11 (1999), 143–71.

Rees, Joan. *Samuel Daniel: A Critical and Biographical Study*. Liverpool, 1964.

Seronsy, Cecil. *Samuel Daniel*. New York, 1967.

Spriet, Pierre. *Samuel Daniel (1563–1619): sa vie, son œuvre*. Paris, 1969.

Davenant, Sir William (1606–1668)

Born February 1606, Oxford. Educated at Lincoln College, Oxford, from 1620, leaving without degree. Active as dramatist, theatre manager (governor of Beeston's Boys in 1640–1), and producer of masques, at least one with Inigo Jones. Fought for Charles I in Civil War; knighted at siege of Gloucester in 1643. Manager of Drury Lane Theatre after Restoration. Later transferred royal patent from Duke's House to Covent Garden. In 1656 staged *The Siege of Rhodes*, first legitimate public theatre performance since closing of theatres, with first appearance of an actress (Mrs Coleman) on an English public stage, and music by Henry Lawes. Died 7 April 1668; buried in Westminster Abbey.

Works:

Maidment, James and W. H. Logan, eds. *Plays*. 5 vols. Edinburgh, 1872–4.

Studies:

Bitot, Michel. "“Alteration in a commonwealth”: disturbing voices in Caroline drama". *Cahiers Elisabethans* 47 (1995), 79–86.

Blaydes, Sophia B. and Philip Bordinat. *Sir William Davenant*. Boston, Mass., 1981.

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- Sir William Davenant: An Annotated Bibliography 1629–1985*. New York and London, 1986.
- Butler, Martin. 'Reform or reverence? The politics of the Caroline masque' in J. R. Mulryne and Margaret Shewring, eds., *Theatre and Government under the Early Stuarts*. Cambridge, 1993, pp. 118–56.
- Collins, Howard S. *The Comedy of Sir William Davenant*. The Hague, 1967.
- Edmond, Mary. *Rare Sir William Davenant*. Manchester, 1987.
- Harbage, Alfred. *Sir William Davenant: Poet Venturer, 1606–1668*. Philadelphia, 1935.
- Kroll, Richard. 'Emblem and empiricism in Davenant's *Macbeth*'. *ELH* 57 (1990), 835–64.
- Nethercot, Arthur H. *Davenant, Poet Laureate and Playwright-Manager*. Chicago, 1938.
- Squier, Charles L. 'Davenant's comic assault on *préciosité: The Platonic Lovers*'. *University of Colorado Studies*. Series in Language and Literature 10 (1966), 57–72.

Davenport, Robert (fl. 1624–1640)

No certain information before 1624, when Henry Herbert licensed his first known plays, *The City Nightcap*, a Euphuistic romance with strong borrowings from Robert Greene, and *Henry I and Henry II* (perhaps two plays). Actively writing as late as 1640, including divine and moral verse; some play titles registered in 1650s. Perhaps alive as late as 1655, when *King John and Matilda* was published with a preface signed by the author.

Works:

- Bullen, A. H., ed. *The Works of Robert Davenport*. Vol. III of *A Collection of Old English Plays*. London, 1882–5. Reprinted, New York, 1964.

Day, John (1574–c. 1640)

Born at Cawston in 1574. A farmer's son from Norfolk; educated at Ely. Entered Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, as sizar in 1592; expelled (1593) for stealing a book. First London mention is August 1598 in Henslowe, listed as collaborator with Chettle. Wrote for Admiral's Men from 1599 to 1603, mostly in collaboration with Dekker, Chettle, and Haughton, specializing in domestic tragedy. Later wrote alone for Children of the Revels. Twenty-two known plays, alone or in collaboration, only one of which saw print. Continued to write plays after 1608, mostly in collaboration with Dekker. Reappears in 1610 as author of *The Mad Pranks of Merry Moll*. Associated with Dekker as dramatist in 1619 and 1623.

Works:

- Bullen, A. H., ed. *The Works of John Day*. 2 vols. London, 1881. Reprinted, 1963, ed. Robin Jeffs.

Studies:

- Schoenbaum, Samuel. 'John Day and Elizabethan drama'. *Boston Public Library Quarterly* 5 (1953), 140–52.
- Villquin, Jean-Pierre. 'Topography in John Day's plays: the dialectic of topicality and Utopia' in Jean-Marie Maguin and Michele Willems, eds., *French Essays on Shakespeare and his Contemporaries: 'What Would France With Us?'* Newark, Del., 1995, pp. 314–22.
- Villquin, Jean-Pierre. 'John Day (fl. 1606) and Jacobean drama: a mirror held up to the stage' in Francois Laroque, ed., *The Show Within: Dramatic and Other Insets: English Renaissance Drama*. Montpellier, 1990, pp. 305–18.

Dekker, Thomas (c. 1572–1632)

Born c. 1572, London. According to Henslowe, first hired as dramatist in 1598; sole author of eight plays and joint author of at least thirty-eight more with Drayton, Jonson, and others between 1598 and 1602, for Admiral's and Worcester's Men. Only six plays from this period survive, the best known being *The Shoemaker's Holiday*. Established as a dramatist, Dekker turned to prose works, including *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), a satire with vivid glimpses of theatrical life. Continued to write in collaboration with Ford, Massinger, and Rowley, primarily for Prince Charles's Men. Listed by Meres as one of the best for tragedy. Died in debt, August 1632.

Works:

- Bowers, Fredson, ed. *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*. 4 vols. Cambridge, 1953–61.
- Hoy, Cyrus. *Introductions, Notes and Commentaries to Texts in 'The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker'*. 4 vols. Cambridge, 1980.

Studies:

- Baston, Jane. 'Rehabilitating Moll's subversion in *The Roaring Girl*'. *SEL* 37 (1997), 317–35.
- Bergeron, David M. 'Thomas Dekker's Lord Mayor's shows'. *ES* 51 (1970), 2–15.
- Clubb, Louise George. 'The virgin martyr and the tragedia sacra'. *RenD* 7 (1964), 103–26.
- Conover, James H. *Thomas Dekker, An Analysis of Dramatic Structure*. The Hague, 1969.
- Donovan, Dennis, ed. *Thomas Dekker, 1945–1965; Thomas Heywood, 1938–1965; Cyril Tourneur, 1945–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 2. London, 1967.
- Garber, Marjorie. 'The logic of the transvestite: *The Roaring Girl*' in David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass, eds., *Staging the Renaissance*. New York, 1991, pp. 221–34.
- Howard, Jean E. 'Sex and social conflict: the erotics of *The Roaring Girl*' in Susan Zimmerman, ed., *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*. New York, 1992, pp. 170–90.

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- Kermode, Lloyd Edward. 'Destination doomsday: desires for change and changeable desires in *The Roaring Girl*'. *ELR* 27 (1997), 421–42.
- Krantz, Susan E. 'Thomas Dekker's Political Commentary in *The Whore of Babylon*,' *SEL* 35 (1995), 271–91.
- Jones-Davies, M. T. *Un peintre de la vie londonienne: Thomas Dekker*. 2 vols. Paris, 1958.
- McLuskie, Kathleen. *Dekker and Heywood: Professional Dramatists*. New York, 1993.
- Mikalachki, Jodi. 'Gender, cant, and cross-talking in *The Roaring Girl*'. *RenD* n.s. 25 (1994), 119–43.
- Orgel, Stephen. 'The subtexts of *The Roaring Girl*' in Susan Zimmerman, ed., *Erotic Politics: Desire on the Renaissance Stage*. New York, 1992, pp. 12–26.
- Price, George R. *Thomas Dekker*. New York, 1968.
- Thomson, Patricia. 'The old way and the new way in Dekker and Massinger'. *MLR* 51 (1956), 168–78.
- Ure, Peter. 'Patient madman and honest whore: the Middleton–Dekker oxymoron'. *E&S* 1966, 18–40.

Drayton, Michael (1563–1631)

Born 1563, Hartshill near Atherstone, Warwickshire. Brought up as page and educated in the household of Sir Henry Goodere of Powlesworth, Warwickshire, who was his early patron. Drayton's later patrons included the Princes Henry and Charles and Lucy, Countess of Bedford. Wrote plays for the Admiral's Men between 1597 and 1602. Described as one of best for tragedy by Meres. Shared in approximately nineteen plays according to Henslowe; none survives. Sharer in Children of the King's Revels at Whitefriars theatre (1607–8). Died 1631. Buried in Westminster Abbey. Jonson included an epitaph for Drayton in his *Underwoods*.

Works:

Hebel, J. William, ed. *The Works of Michael Drayton*. 5 vols. Oxford, 1931–41. Rev. edn Bent Juel-Jensen, 1961.

Studies:

- Champion, Larry S. "'Havoc in the Commonwealth": perspective, political ideology and dramatic strategy in *Sir John Oldcastle* and the English chronicle plays'. *MARDIE* 5 (1991), 165–79.
- Hardin, R. F. *Michael Drayton and the Passing of Elizabethan England*. Lawrence, Kans., 1973.
- Harner, James L. *Samuel Daniel and Michael Drayton: A Reference Guide*. Boston, Mass., 1980.
- Newdigate, B. H. *Michael Drayton and his Circle*, corr. edn. Oxford, 1961.

Edwards [Edwardes], Richard (1524–1566)

Born 1524, Somerset. BA, Corpus Christi College, Oxford, 1544; elected to fellowship the same year. May have taken orders between 1547 and 1550. Upon advancement

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to MA (1547), encouraged acting of plays at Christ Church, previously a rare event. Appointed Gentleman of the Chapel 1560 and Master of the Children of the Chapel Royal, 1561–5; took the Boys to Lincoln's Inn 1565–6 for their first performance away from court. Praised by Meres as among best for comedy and by Hollyband in *The French Schoolmaster* (1573) as a 'great player of plays'. Prologue to *Damon and Pithias* (1564/5; published 1571) contains the first statement of dramatic principles in an English play, including the earliest use of 'tragicomedy'. Died October 1566.

Works:

White, D. Jerry, ed. *Richard Edwards' 'Damon and Pithias': A Critical Old-Spelling Edition*. New York, 1980.

Studies:

Cope, Jackson. *Dramaturgy of the Demonic*. Baltimore, 1984, chapter 2.

Hartley, Andrew James. 'The color of "honesty": ethics and courtly pragmatism in *Damon and Pithias*'. *MARDIE* 11 (1999), 88–113.

Field, Nathan (1587–1619/20)

Baptized at St Giles, Cripplegate, 17 October 1587. Son of preacher John Field, an outspoken opponent of the stage during the 1580s. Two known brothers: Nathaniel, a printer, and Theophilus, eventually Bishop of Hereford. Scholar of St Paul's School; by the age of twelve was pressed into the Children of the Chapel Royal at the second Blackfriars theatre by Nathaniel Giles and may have appeared in *Cynthia's Revels* in 1600 and *The Poetaster* in 1601. Leading actor at the Chapel, performing Bussy in Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* (c. 1604), his most famous role; also acted in Jonson's *Epicæne* (1609). His company was absorbed into Lady Elizabeth's Men in 1613, and he became their leader. Joined King's Men in 1615 and remained until at least 1619 (his name appears after that date only in the list of actors in Shakespeare's First Folio, 1623). Wrote *Woman is a Weathercock* and *Amends for Ladies* and collaborated with other playwrights between 1612 and 1619, including Massinger on *The Fatal Dowry*, as well as writing a defence of the stage. Portrait in Dulwich College gallery. Highly praised as an actor, he was ranked with Burbage as 'best actor' by Jonson in *Bartholomew Fair*. Died 1619/20.

Works:

Peery, William, ed. *Plays*. Austin, Tex., 1950.

Study:

Brinkley, R. F. *Nathan Field, The Actor-Playwright*. New Haven, Conn., 1928.

Fletcher, John (1579–1625)

Born December 1579, Rye, Sussex. From a distinguished family; younger son of Richard Fletcher, vicar of Rye, who later served as chaplain at execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, and was eventually Bishop of Bristol and of London. Nephew to Giles

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Fletcher the elder; cousin to clerical poets Giles Fletcher the younger and Phineas Fletcher. Probably entered Benet College, now Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, October 1591. Real success begins c. 1607 with friendship and collaboration with Beaumont (q.v.). They wrote at least seven plays together, including *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, and *A King and No King*. Sole author of at least sixteen plays, including *The Faithful Shepherdess*; collaborator on numerous romantic tragedies and tragicomedies with Massinger, Middleton, Rowley, and possibly Jonson. Collaborated with Shakespeare on *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, *Henry VIII*, and the lost *Cardenio*. Died August 1625, of plague. Buried at St Saviour's, Southwark (Southwark Cathedral).

Works:

Bowers, Fredson, gen. ed. *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*. 10 vols. Cambridge, 1966–96.

Studies:

- Bamford, Karen. 'Sexual violence in *The Queen of Corinth*' in Helen Ostovich, Mary Silcox, and Graham Roebuck, eds., *Other Voices, Other Views: Expanding the Canon in English Renaissance Studies*. Cranbury, N.J., 1999, pp. 234–52.
- Bliss, Lee. 'Defending Fletcher's shepherds'. *SEL* 23 (1983), 295–310.
- Bruster, Douglas. 'The Jailer's daughter and the politics of madwomen's language'. *SQ* 46 (1995), 277–300.
- Clark, Sandra. – see under Francis Beaumont.
- Crawford, Julie. 'Fletcher's *The Tragedie of Bonduca* and the anxieties of the masculine government of James I'. *SEL* 39 (1999), 357–81.
- Foster, Verna A. 'Sex averted or converted: sexuality and tragicomic genre in the plays of Fletcher'. *SEL* 32 (1992), 311–22.
- Hoy, Cyrus. 'The language of Fletcherian tragicomedy' in J. C. Gray, ed., *Mirror up to Shakespeare*. Toronto, 1984, pp. 99–113.
- Leech, Clifford. *The John Fletcher Plays*. London, 1962.
- McLuskie, Kathleen. '"A maidenhead, Amintor, at my yeares": chastity and tragicomedy in the Fletcher plays' in Gordon McMullan and Jonathan Hope, eds., *The Politics of Tragicomedy*. London, 1992, pp. 92–121.
- McMullan, Gordon. *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher*. Amherst, Mass., 1994.
- Mincoff, Marco. 'Shakespeare, Fletcher and baroque tragedy'. *ShS* 20 (1967), 1–15.
- Pearse, Nancy C. *John Fletcher's Chastity Plays: Mirrors of Modesty*. Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, 1973.
- Squier, C. L. *John Fletcher*. Boston, Mass., 1986.
- Waith, Eugene M. *The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher*. New Haven, Conn., 1952.
- See also Francis Beaumont.

Ford, John (1586–c. 1640)

Born at Ilsington, Devon, baptized 17 April 1586. From an established landed family; probably related through mother to Lord Chief Justice Popham. Matriculated

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Exeter College, Oxford, 1601; entered Middle Temple 1602. Intermittent patronage of Duke of Newcastle, Lord Craven, and Earls of Antrim and Peterborough. May have practised law; by 1613 was writing for the stage, collaborating with Dekker on comedies at first. Last known play published 1639. Believed to have returned to Devonshire before his death, c. 1640.

Works:

- Bang, W. and Henry De Vocht, eds. *John Ford's Dramatic Works*. 2 vols. Louvain, vol. I, 1908; vol. II, 1927.
Gifford, William, ed. *The Works of John Ford*. 3 vols. 1827. Rev. edn A. Dyce. London, 1869.

Studies:

- Anderson, D. K. *John Ford*. New York, 1972.
Anderson, D. K., ed. 'Concord in Discord': *The Plays of John Ford 1586-1986*. New York, 1986.
Barbour, Reid. 'Recent studies in John Ford (1977-1989)'. *ELR* 21 (1991), 102-17.
Barish, Jonas. 'Perkin Warbeck as anti-history'. *EIC* 20 (1970), 151-71.
Barton, Anne. 'He that plays the king: Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* and the Stuart history play' in Marie Axton and Raymond Williams, eds., *English Drama: Forms and Development*. Cambridge, 1977, pp. 69-93.
Champion, Larry S. 'Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and the Jacobean tragic perspective'. *PMLA* 90 (1975), 78-87.
Clark, Ira. – see under Richard Brome.
Davril, Robert. *Le Drame de John Ford*. Bibliothèque des langues modernes, 5. Paris, 1954.
Farr, Dorothy M. *John Ford and the Caroline Theatre*. London and New York, 1979.
Hopkins, Lisa. *John Ford's Political Theater*. Manchester, 1994.
Huebert, Ronald. *John Ford Baroque English Dramatist*. Montreal and London, 1979.
Kaufmann, R. J. 'Ford's tragic perspective'. *TSLI* 1 (1960), 522-37.
'Ford's "Waste Land": *The Broken Heart*'. *RenD* n.s. 3 (1970), 167-88.
Leech, Clifford. *John Ford and the Drama of his Time*. London, 1957.
Neill, Michael. '"Anticke Pageantrie": the mannerist art of *Perkin Warbeck*'. *RenD* n.s. 7 (1976), 85-106.
'Ford's unbroken art: the moral design of *The Broken Heart*'. *MLR* 75 (1980), 249-68.
Neill, Michael, ed. *John Ford: Critical Re-Visions*. Cambridge, 1988.
Oliver, H. J. *The Problem of John Ford*. Melbourne, 1955.
Orbison, Tucker. *The Tragic Vision of John Ford*. Jacobean Drama Studies 21. Salzburg, 1974.
Sanders, Julie. – see under Richard Brome.
Sensabaugh, G. F. *The Tragic Muse of John Ford*. Palo Alto, Calif., 1944.
Stavig, Mark. *John Ford and the Traditional Moral Order*. Madison, Wis., 1968.
Tucker, Kenneth. *A Bibliography of... John Ford and Cyril Tourneur*. Boston, Mass., 1977.
Wymer, Rowland. *Webster and Ford*. New York, 1995.

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Fraunce, Abraham (1558–1633)

Born 1558, Shrewsbury. Entered Shrewsbury School, where he became acquainted with Sir Philip Sidney. Pensioner at St John's College, Cambridge, in May 1575, Lady Margaret scholar in November 1578, and fellow in 1581. Proceeded BA 1579–80 and MA 1583. Gained notice as an actor and dramatist in Cambridge productions of Latin plays, rendering an Italian play into the Latin comedy *Victoria*, performed at St John's in 1579. Believed to be the author of Latin *Hymenaeus*, the first university play based on a novella, acted at St John's in 1579. Having received an administrative post with the Council of Wales in the service of the Earl of Bridgewater shortly after 1590, seems to have abandoned literary pursuits. Died 1633.

Gager, William (1555–1622)

Born 24 July 1555, Long Melford, Suffolk. Educated at Melford and Westminster School. Entered Christ Church, Oxford, as Queen's Scholar 1574, advancing BA 1577, MA 1580; incorporated MA Cambridge 1581. Senecan tragedy *Meleager*, written shortly after 1580, highly successful and revived for Earls of Leicester and Pembroke 1584/5. Rhetor at Oxford 1583–4; doctorate in civil law 1589. His comedy *Rivales* and tragedy *Dido* performed at Christ Church before Polish Count Albert Alasco in June 1583. Hostile to the professional stage (engaging in 1592–3 academic stage quarrel with Rainolds); friend of George Peele, and outspoken advocate of the educational value of university plays in classical languages. Major dramatic presence throughout the 1580s at Christ Church. Last and best play, *Ulysses Redux*, performed there 1592; *Rivales* revived with great success for Elizabeth same year. Chancellor of the diocese of Ely, 1606. Last major work, a poem on the Gunpowder Plot, presented to James I in 1608. Buried in All Saints' Church, Cambridge, September 1622.

Works:

- Binns, J. W., ed. *Oedipus* (acted 1577–92) and *Dido* (acted 1583). Renaissance Latin Drama in England, 1st Series, 1. New York, 1981.
Binns, J. W., ed. *Meleager* (1592), *Ulysses Redux* (1592), *Panniculus Hippolyto* (1591). Renaissance Latin Drama in England, 1st Series, 2. New York, 1981.

Studies:

- Binns, J. W. 'William Gager's *Meleager* and *Ulysses Redux*' in Elmer M. Blistein, ed., *The Drama of the Renaissance: Essays for Leicester Bradner*. Providence, R.I., 1970, pp. 27–41.
Brooke, C. F. Tucker. 'The life and times of William Gager'. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 95 (1951), 401–31.
Norland, Howard B. 'Gager's *Ulysses Redux* Tragoedia Nova' in Michel Bitot, ed., *'Divers Toyes Mengled': Essays on Medieval and Renaissance Culture*. Tours, 1996, pp. 199–210.

Biographies and select bibliography

Gascoigne, George (c. 1534–1577)

Born at Cardington, Bedfordshire. Elder son of Sir John Gascoigne and Margaret, daughter of Sir Robert Scargill of Scargill, Yorkshire. Educated at Trinity College, Cambridge; left without taking degree. Entered Gray's Inn 1555; MP for Bedfordshire, 1557–9. Translated Ludovico Ariosto's *Gli Suppositi* (*The Supposes*, acted Gray's Inn 1566), which later supplied Shakespeare with the Lucentio sub-plot for *Taming of the Shrew*. Military service in Holland 1572–5. Wrote entertainment for Elizabeth I (Kenilworth, 1575) and *The Spoil of Antwerp* (1577). *Jocasta* (1566) from Euripides' *Phoenissae*, was first Greek tragedy on the English stage. Died 7 October, 1577; buried at St Mary's, Stamford.

Works:

Cunliffe, John W., ed. *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne*. 2 vols. Cambridge, 1907–10.

Gascoigne, George. *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. G. W. Pigman III. Oxford, 2000.

Studies:

Haynes, Evelyn. 'George Gascoigne: a bibliography of secondary sources'. *Bulletin of Bibliography* 49 (1992), 209–14.

Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Minor Elizabethans*. Roger Ascham, 1946–1966; George Gascoigne, 1941–1966; John Heywood, 1944–1966; Thomas Kyd, 1940–1966 Anthony Munday, 1941–1966. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 9. London, 1968.

Prouty, C. T. *George Gascoigne, Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier and Poet*. New York, 1942; reprinted 1966.

Glaphthorne, Henry (1610–c. 1643)

Born 28 July 1610, Whittlesey, Cambridgeshire. Educated at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Wrote nine known tragedies and comedies performed between c. 1632 and 1642 at court as well as at the Globe, the Cockpit in Drury Lane, and Salisbury Court theatre. *Argalus and Parthenia*, based on Sidney's *Arcadia*, printed in 1639, as was *Albertus Wallenstein*, an historical tragedy. Publication of *White-Hall: A Poem* (1643) is last known mention.

Works:

Shepherd, R. H., ed. *The Plays and Poems of Henry Glaphthorne*. 2 vols. London, 1874.

Study:

Davis, Joe Lee. *The Sons of Ben: Jonsonian Comedy in Caroline England*. Detroit, 1967.

Biographies and select bibliography

Goffe (Gough), Thomas (1591–1629)

Born 1591 in Essex. Son of a clergyman. Queen's scholar at Westminster School; scholarship at Christ Church, Oxford, November 1609. BA 1613; MA 1616; BD 1623. Also incorporated MA, Cambridge, 1617. Took orders and received the living of East Clandon, Surrey, 1623. While at Christ Church, wrote three tragedies, acted after 1616 while he was still resident there. *The Careless Shepherdess*, a tragicomedy, was successfully acted before Charles I and at Salisbury Court theatre.

Works:

Carnegie, David, ed. *The Raging Turke*. Oxford, 1968. Revised, 1974.
The Courageous Turk. Oxford, 1974.

Greene, Robert (1558–1592)

Baptized 11 July 1558, Norwich. Son of a saddler of comfortable though not wealthy family. Sizar at St John's College, Cambridge, 1575, taking BA in 1578. Returned to Clare Hall, Cambridge, after European travels, to take MA in 1583; incorporated MA, Oxford, 1588. By 1587 was writing romantic histories and comedies for the Admiral's and Queen's Men, including *James IV* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. Achieved literary notoriety by 1588, gaining patronage of the Earls of Arundel and Essex, and friendship of Peele, Nashe, Marlowe, and Lodge. Mentioned by Meres as among best for comedy. Died in squalor 3 September 1592. Buried in New Churchyard, near Bedlam.

Works:

Collins, John Churton, ed. *The Plays and Poems of Robert Greene*. 2 vols. Oxford, 1905.
Grosart, A. B., ed. *The Life and Complete Works in Prose and Verse of Robert Greene*. 15 vols. London, 1881–6. Reprinted, New York, 1964.

Studies:

Braunmuller, A. R. "“Second means”: Agent and accessory in Elizabethan drama' in A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee, eds., *The Elizabethan Theatre XI*. Port Credit, Ontario, 1990, pp. 177–203.
‘The serious comedy of Greene's *James IV*’. *ELR* 3 (1973), 335–50.
Crupi, Charles W. *Robert Greene*. Boston, Mass., 1986.
Dean, James Seay. *Robert Greene: A Reference Guide*. Boston, Mass., 1984.
Donovan, Kevin J. ‘Recent studies in Robert Greene (1968–1988)’. *ELR* 20 (1990), 163–175.
Empson, William. *Some Versions of Pastoral*. London, 1935.
Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Robert Greene, 1945–65; Thomas Lodge, 1939–1965; John Lyly, 1939–1965; Thomas Nashe, 1941–1965; George Peele, 1939–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 5. London, 1968.
Jordan, J. C. *Robert Greene*. New York, 1915. Reprinted, New York, 1965.

Biographies and select bibliography

- Leggatt, Alexander. 'Bohan and Oberon: the internal debate in Greene's *James IV*' in A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee, eds., *The Elizabethan Theatre XI*. Port Credit, Ontario, 1990, pp. 95–116.
- Muir, Kenneth. 'Robert Greene as dramatist' in Richard Holsey, ed., *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*. Columbia, Mo., 1962, pp. 45–54.
- Senn, Werner. *Studies in the Dramatic Construction of Robert Greene and George Peele*. Swiss Studies in English 74. Bern, 1973.
- Weld, John. *Meaning in Comedy: Studies in Elizabethan Romantic Comedy*. Albany, N.Y., 1975.
- Wertheim, Albert. 'The presentation of sin in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*'. *Criticism* 16 (1974), 273–86.

Greville, Fulke (1554–1628)

Born at Beauchamp Court, Warwickshire; educated with Sir Philip Sidney at Shrewsbury, then a fellow-commoner at Jesus College, Cambridge. At court with Sidney, also became a favourite of Elizabeth. Member of Harvey's Areopagus group and entertained Giordano Bruno on his visit to London in 1583. Held various offices of state under Elizabeth I and James VI and I; Privy Councillor to James. Friend of Bacon, Camden, Coke, Daniel, and Davenant. Granted Warwick Castle by James I and created first Baron Brooke. Two closet political tragedies, *Mustapha* and *Alaham*, survive, with a sonnet sequence, *Caelica*, and a series of learned poems.

Works:

Bullough, Geoffrey, ed. *Poems and Dramas*. 2 vols. London, 1939.

Studies:

- Barish, Jonas. 'Language for the study, language for the stage' in A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee, eds., *The Elizabethan Theatre XII*. Toronto, 1993, pp. 19–43.
- Larson, Charles. *Fulke Greville*. Boston, Mass., 1980.
- Rebholz, R. A. *The Life of Fulke Greville, First Lord Brooke*. Oxford, 1971.
- Rees, J. *Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, 1554–1628: A Critical Biography*. London, 1971.

Hathaway, Richard (fl. 1598–1603)

According to Henslowe, wrote for the Admiral's Men (1598–1602) and for Worcester's Men (1602–3). Collaborators included Drayton, Munday, Haughton, and Chettle. Only extant play is *Sir John Oldcastle* (1600), a successful comedy written in collaboration with Drayton and others for the Admiral's Men as an answer to Shakespeare's Falstaff in *Henry IV*.

Work:

The Life of Sir John Oldcastle. 1600. London, 1908.

Biographies and select bibliography

Study:

Champion, Larry S. – *see under* Michael Drayton.

Haughton, William (c. 1575–c. 1605)

Earliest mention of any certainty is in Henslowe, November 1597, referring to him as ‘young Horton’. Wrote steadily for Henslowe thereafter, producing comedies and tragedies, usually in collaboration with Chettle, Day, Dekker, and others. Perhaps best-known collaboration is with Dekker and Chettle on *Patient Grissil* (1600). One play of his sole authorship probably written early in 1598: *Englishmen for my Money: Or, A Woman will have her Will*, the first ‘city comedy’ of London life and very popular. Supposed author of *Grim the Collier of Croydon* (c. 1600), also a popular play. Last mention is in September 1602, when engaged on ‘a playe called “Cartwright”’.

Works:

Baillie, William M., ed. *A Choice Ternary of English Plays*. Binghamton, N.Y., 1984.

Studies:

- Kermode, Lloyd Edward. ‘After Shylock: the “Judaizer” in England’. *Renaissance and Reformation* 20 (1996), 5–26.
- Hoenselaars, A. J. ‘Reconstructing Babel in English Renaissance drama: William Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money* and John Marston’s *Antonio and Mellida*’. *Neophilologus* 76 (1992), 464–79.

Heywood, John (1497? – 1580?)

Educated Broadgates Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford. Royal service as singer–musician by 1515. Married Thomas More’s niece, Eliza Rastell. A Roman Catholic, enjoyed Mary I’s patronage, but retired to Malines (Mechelen), Belgium on Elizabeth I’s accession. Died there after 1577 and before 1597.

Works:

Heywood, John. *Plays*, ed. Richard Axton and Peter Happé. Cambridge, 1991.

Studies:

- Johnson, Robert C. *John Heywood*. New York, 1970.
- Johnson, Robert C., comp. *Minor Elizabethans... John Heywood 1944–66...* Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements, 9. London, 1968.
- Tannenbaum, S. A. *John Heywood*. Elizabethan Bibliographies, 36. New York, 1946.
- Walker, Greg. *Plays of Persuasion: Drama and Politics at the Court of Henry VIII*. Cambridge, 1991.

Biographies and select bibliography

Heywood, Thomas (1573/4–1641)

Born 1573/4, probably in Lincolnshire. Educated at Cambridge. Mentioned by Henslowe in 1594. Actor with the Admiral's Men 1598–9 and subsequently for Worcester's company (later Queen Anne's) from 1602/3–19. Refers to having 'an entire hand, or at least a main finger' in over two hundred and twenty plays, most of them lost. Wrote an important early defence, *An Apology for Actors* (c. 1607/8; published 1612). Went into semi-retirement in 1619 but reappears in the 1630s, enjoying revivals of his earlier plays and writing two successful new plays. Buried St James's, Clerkenwell.

Works:

Shepherd, R. H., ed. *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Heywood*. 6 vols. London, 1874. Reprinted, New York, 1964.

Studies:

Baines, Barbara J. *Thomas Heywood*. Boston, Mass., 1984.

Boas, F. S. *Thomas Heywood*. London, 1950.

Brown, Arthur. 'Thomas Heywood's dramatic art' in Richard Hosley, ed., *Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama in Honor of Hardin Craig*. Columbia, Mo., 1962, pp. 327–40.

Clark, Arthur M. *Thomas Heywood, Playwright and Miscellanist* (1931). Reprinted, New York, 1967.

Crupi, Charles W. 'Ideological contradiction in Part I of Heywood's *Edward IV*: "Our musicke runs . . . much upon discords"'. *MARDIE* 7 (1995) 224–56.

Dean, Paul. – see under Henry Chettle.

Donovan, Dennis, ed. *Thomas Dekker, 1945–1965; Thomas Heywood, 1938–1965; Cyril Tourneur, 1945–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 2. London, 1967.

Grivelet, Michel. *Thomas Heywood et le drame domestique élizabéthain*. Paris, 1957. 'The simplicity of Thomas Heywood'. *ShS* 14 (1961), 56–65.

Hirschfeld, Heather. – see under Richard Brome.

Howard, Jean E. 'An English lass amid the moors: gender, race, sexuality, and national identity in Heywood's *The Fair Maid of the West*' in Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, eds., *Women, 'Race,' and Writing in the Early Modern Period*. London, 1994, pp. 101–17.

Jankowski, Theodora A. 'Historicizing and legitimizing capitalism: Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*'. *MARDIE* 7 (1995), 305–37.

Johnson, M. L. *Images of Women in the Works of Thomas Heywood*. Jacobean Drama Studies 42. Salzburg, 1974.

Kiefer, Frederick. 'Heywood as moralist in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*'. *MARDIE* 3 (1986), 83–98.

McLuskie, Kathleen. – see under Thomas Dekker.

McQuade, Paula. "'A labyrinth of sin": marriage and moral capacity in Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*'. *MP* 98 (2000), 231–250.

Biographies and select bibliography

- Orlin, Lena Cowen. 'Familial transgressions, societal transaction on the Elizabethan stage' in Carole Levin and Karen Robertson, eds., *Sexuality and Politics in Renaissance Drama*. Lewiston, N.Y., 1991, pp. 27–55.
- Panek, Jennifer. 'Punishing adultery in *A Woman Killed with Kindness*'. *SEL* 34 (1994), 357–78.
- Rowland, Richard. '*The Captives*: Thomas Heywood's "whole monopoly of mischeiff"'. *MLR* 90 (1995), 585–602.
- Rabkin, Norman. 'Dramatic deception in Heywood's *The English Traveller*'. *SEL* 1 (1961), 1–16.
- Smith, Hallett. '*A Woman Killed with Kindness*'. *PMLA* 53 (1939), 138–47.
- Townsend, F. L. 'The artistry of Thomas Heywood: double plots'. *PQ* 25 (1946), 97–119.
- Ure, Peter. 'Marriage and the domestic drama in Heywood and Ford'. *ES* 32 (1951), 200–16.
- Wentworth, Michael. *Thomas Heywood: A Reference Guide*. Boston, Mass., 1986.
- 'Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* as domestic morality' in David G. Allen and Robert A. White, eds., *Tradition and Innovations: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. Newark, Del., 1990, pp. 150–62.

Jonson, Benjamin (1572/3–1637)

Born at or near London between May 1572 and May 1573. Posthumous son of a clergyman, probably of Scottish border descent. Attended Westminster School under William Camden. Military service in Flanders by 1592. Working for Henslowe as player and dramatist in 1597. Joined Pembroke's Men; imprisoned summer 1597 for his part in authorship of *Isle of Dogs*, allegedly seditious. Wrote for Admiral's and Lord Chamberlain's Men, Children of Queen's Chapel, and Lady Elizabeth's Men, establishing reputation as writer of comedy with *Every Man in his Humour* (1598). Plays performed at court and at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Leading figure in 'War of the Theatres'; regularly suspected of sedition, popery, or *lèse-majesté* in plays such as *Eastward Ho* and *Sejanus*. Leading figure with Inigo Jones in court masques. Chronologer of London 1628; lost royal patronage in 1631 after quarrel with Jones. Died August 1637. Buried in Westminster Abbey with epitaph, 'O rare Ben Jonson'.

Works:

- Herford, C. H., Percy and Evelyn Simpson, eds. *Ben Jonson*. 11 vols. Oxford, 1925–52.
- Orgel, Stephen, ed. *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*. New Haven, Conn., 1969.
- Redwine, James D., Jr, ed. *Ben Jonson's Literary Criticism*. Lincoln, Nebr., 1970.

Studies:

- See Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*. Cambridge, 2000.

Biographies and select bibliography

Killigrew, Thomas (1612–1683)

Born 7 February 1612, Lothbury, London. Page to Charles I at age twenty-one. Plays first performed in London by 1636, at the Phoenix and the Cockpit in Drury Lane. Given grant with Davenant of exclusive patents to open two new theatre companies in 1660. Built playhouse on current site of Drury Lane theatre (1663); opened training school for young actors at the Barbican (1673). Master of the Revels (1679). Died at Whitehall 19 March 1683.

Works:

Reich, William T., ed. *Claricilla*. New York, 1980.

Summers, Montague, ed. *The Parson's Wedding, The London Cuckolds, and Sir Courtly Nice, Or, It Cannot Be*. London, 1921.

Studies:

Harbage, Alfred B. *Thomas Killigrew, Cavalier Dramatist, 1612–1683*. Philadelphia, 1930.

Raber, Karen L. 'Warrior women in the plays of Cavendish and Killigrew'. *SEL* 40 (2000), 413–33.

Kyd, Thomas (1558–1594)

Baptized at St Mary Woolnoth, London, 6 November 1558. Son of scrivener Francis Kyd. Attended Merchant Taylors' School, London, where he was contemporary of Spenser. Began career as a translator and dramatist, entering service of a lord (possibly Ferdinando, Lord Strange) in 1590. Lived with Marlowe 1591; associate of Greene, Nashe, and Lodge. His *Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587) gained immense popularity and generated numerous parodies. Believed to have written early version of *Hamlet*. Arrested 12 May 1593, on suspicion of 'lewd and mutinous libels', specifically heresy and atheism. Died poor in 1594.

Works:

Boas, F. S., ed. *The Works of Thomas Kyd*. Oxford, 1901; rev. edn, 1955.

Studies:

Ardolino, Frank R. *Thomas Kyd's Mystery Play: Myth and Ritual in 'The Spanish Tragedy'*. New York, 1985.

Carrère, Félix. *Le Théâtre de Thomas Kyd: contribution à l'étude du drame élizabéthain*. Toulouse, 1951.

Díaz-Fernández, Jose Ramon. "Thomas Kyd: a bibliography, 1966–1992," *Bulletin of Bibliography* 52 (1995) 1–13.

Diehl, Huston. 'Observing the Lord's Supper and the Lord Chamberlain's Men: the visual rhetoric of ritual and play in early modern England'. *RenD* n.s. 22 (1991), 147–74.

- Dillon, Janette. 'The Spanish Tragedy and staging languages in Renaissance drama'. *RORD* 34 (1995), 14-40.
- Edwards, Philip. *Thomas Kyd and Early Elizabethan Tragedy*. Writers and Their Works. London, 1966.
- 'Thrusting Elysium into Hell: the originality of the *Spanish Tragedy*' in A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee, eds., *The Elizabethan Theatre XI*. Port Credit, Ontario, 1990, pp. 117-32.
- Freeman, Arthur. *Thomas Kyd: Facts and Problems*. Oxford, 1967.
- Hill, Eugene D. 'Senecan and Vergilian perspectives in *The Spanish Tragedy*' in A. F. Kinney and D. S. Collins, eds., *Renaissance Historicism: Selections from 'English Literary Renaissance'*. Amherst, Mass., 1987, pp. 108-30.
- Hunter, G. K. 'Ironies of justice in *The Spanish Tragedy*'. *RenD* 8 (1965), 89-104.
- Jensen, Ejner. 'Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*: the play explains itself'. *JEGP* 64 (1965), 7-16.
- Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Minor Elizabethans*. Roger Ascham, 1946-1966; George Gascoigne, 1941-1966; John Heywood, 1944-1966; Thomas Kyd, 1940-1966; Anthony Munday, 1941-1966. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 9. London, 1968.
- Mazzio, Carla. 'Staging the vernacular: language and nation in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*'. *SEL* 38 (1998), 207-32.
- Mulryne, J. R. 'Nationality and language in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*' in Jean Pierre Marquetot and Michele Willems, eds., *Travel and Drama in Shakespeare's Time*. Cambridge, 1996, pp. 97-105.
- Murray, Peter B. *Thomas Kyd*. New York, 1970.
- Shapiro, James. "'Tragedies naturally performed": Kyd's representation of violence, *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1587)' in David Scott Kastan and Peter Stallybrass, eds., *Staging the Renaissance: Reinterpretations of Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama*. New York, 1991, pp. 99-113.
- Siemon, James R. 'Dialogical formalism: word, object, and action in *The Spanish Tragedy*'. *MARDIE* 5 (1991), 87-115.
- Siemon, James R. 'Sporting Kyd'. *ELR* 24 (1994), 553-82.
- Smith, Molly. 'The theater and the scaffold: death as spectacle in *The Spanish Tragedy*'. *SEL* 32 (1992), 217-32.
- Stockholder, Kay. 'The aristocratic woman as scapegoat: romantic love and class antagonism in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, and *The Changeling*' in A. L. Magnusson and C. E. McGee, eds., *The Elizabethan Theatre XIV*. Toronto, 1998, pp. 127-51.
- Watson, Robert N. *The Rest is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance*. Berkeley, Calif., 1994, chapter 1.

Lodge, Thomas (1558-1625)

Born in West Ham, son of Sir Thomas Lodge, Lord Mayor of London. Attended Merchant Taylors' School and Trinity College, Oxford, 1573-7; entered Lincoln's Inn 1578. MD University of Avignon 1598 and Oxford 1602. His *Wounds of Civil War* (c. 1587) is an early classical history play; collaborated with Greene on *A Looking Glass for London and England* (c. 1588). An acknowledged recusant, Lodge continued medical career along with translating and writing. Died London 1625, probably of plague.

Biographies and select bibliography

Works:

Gosse, Edmund, ed. *The Complete Works of Thomas Lodge*. 4 vols. Glasgow, 1883.

Studies:

Cantar, Brenda. 'Monstrous conceptions and Lodge's *Robin the Devil*'. *SEL* 37 (1997), 39–53.

Cuvelier, Eliane. *Thomas Lodge: témoin de son temps*. Paris, 1984.

Donovan, Kevin J. 'Recent studies in Thomas Lodge (1969–1990)'. *ELR* 23 (1993), 201–11.

Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Robert Greene, 1945–65; Thomas Lodge, 1939–1965; John Lyly, 1939–1965; Thomas Nashe, 1941–1965; George Peele, 1939–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 5. London, 1968.

Paradise, N. B. *Thomas Lodge: The History of an Elizabethan*. New Haven, Conn., 1931.

Rae, W. D. *Thomas Lodge*. New York, 1967.

Tenney, Edward A. *Thomas Lodge*. Ithaca, N.Y., 1935.

Lyly, John (1554?–1606)

Born in Weald of Kent. William Lily, grandfather, was High Master of St Paul's School; father, Peter Lyly, a diocesan official in Canterbury. Attended King's School, Canterbury; took BA 1573, MA 1575 under Burghley's patronage at Magdalen College, Oxford; incorporated MA, Cambridge, 1579. Admitted to Gray's Inn, Christmas 1594. Wrote influential prose romance *Euphuies, or the Anatomy of Wit* (1578). Vice-master of Children of St Paul's through Earl of Oxford's patronage in 1580s; leased Blackfriars theatre, where he wrote and produced numerous plays. Wrote for Paul's Boys and for court performance. With Nashe, wrote retorts to Martin Marprelate pamphlets 1589–90; MP for Hindon, Aylesbury, and Appleby, respectively, 1589–1601. Sought and failed to obtain position as Master of Revels. Died November 1606, London.

Works:

Bond, R. Warwick, ed. *The Complete Works of John Lyly*. 3 vols. Oxford, 1902.

Daniel, Carter A., ed. *The Plays of John Lyly*. Lewisburg, Penn., 1988.

Studies:

Barish, Jonas. 'The prose style of John Lyly'. *ELH* 23 (1956), 14–35.

Bevington, David. '"Jack hath not jill": failed courtship in Lyly and Shakespeare'. *SbS* 42 (1990), 1–13.

'Lyly's *Endymion* and *Midas*: the Catholic Question in England'. *CompD* 32 (1998), 26–46.

Cartwright, Kent. 'The confusions of *Gallathea*: John Lyly as popular dramatist'. *CompD* 32 (1998), 207–39.

Donovan, Kevin J. 'Recent studies in John Lyly (1969–1990)'. *ELR* 22 (1992), 435–50.

Houppert, Joseph W. *John Lyly*. Boston, Mass., 1975.

Biographies and select bibliography

- Hunter, G. K. *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier*. London, 1962.
Lyly and Peele. Writers and Their Works. London, 1968.
- Jankowski, Theodora A. "The scorn of savage people": virginity as "forbidden sensuality" in John Lyly's *Love's Metamorphosis*. *RenD* 24 (1993), 123–53.
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- Jeffery, Violet M. *John Lyly and the Italian Renaissance*. Paris, 1928.
- Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Robert Greene, 1945–65; Thomas Lodge, 1939–1965; John Lyly, 1939–65; Thomas Nashe, 1941–1965; George Peele, 1939–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 5. London, 1968.
- Pincombe, Michael. *The Plays of John Lyly: Eros and Eliza*. Manchester, 1996.
- Saccio, Peter. *The Court Comedies of John Lyly: A Study in Allegorical Dramaturgy*. Princeton, N.J., 1969.
- Shannon, Laurie. 'Nature's bias: Renaissance homonormativity and Elizabethan comic likeness'. *MP* 98 (2000), 183–210.
- Tetzeli von Rosador, Kurt. 'The power of magic: from *Endimion* to *The Tempest*'. *ShS* 43 (1991), 1–13.

Marlowe, Christopher (1564–1593)

Born 6 February 1564, Canterbury. Son of shoemaker John Marlowe and Catherine Arthur of Dover. Educated at King's School, Canterbury, 1578–80. Entered Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, 1580, as Parker Scholar. Awarded BA 1584 and MA 1587. Moved to London 1587–8 to pursue career as dramatist. Immediately successful; most of his plays performed by the Lord Admiral's Men. *Tamburlaine* (c. 1587) was widely imitated. Knew many in London literary scene; testimonials from Blount, Nashe, Chapman, Jonson, and Drayton. Walsingham's secret agent; probably the 'Marlin' who carried letters from France to Cecil in 1592. Arrested for coining in Low Countries 1591/2. Killed 30 May 1593, in drunken quarrel with Ingram Frisar over tavern bill. Meres describes his death as a 'judgment of God' for 'epicurism and atheism'. Buried in parish church of St Nicholas, Deptford.

Works:

- Bowers, Fredson, ed. *The Complete Works of Christopher Marlowe*. 2 vols. Rev. edn. Cambridge, 1981.
- Case, R. H., ed. *The Works and Life of Christopher Marlowe*. 6 vols. London, 1930–3. Reprinted, New York, 1966.

Studies:

- Barber, C. L. 'The form of Faustus' fortunes good or bad'. *TDR* 8 (1964), 92–119.
- Bartels, Emily Carroll, ed. *Critical Essays on Christopher Marlowe*. New York, 1997.
- Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe*. Philadelphia, 1993.
- Battenhouse, Roy W. 'Tamburlaine, the scourge of God'. *PMLA* 56 (1941), 337–48.
- Bluestone, Max. 'Libido Speculandi: doctrine and dramaturgy in contemporary interpretations of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*' in Norman Rabkin, ed., *Reinterpretations of Elizabethan Drama*. New York, 1969, pp. 33–88.

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- Cope, Jackson I. *Dramaturgy of the Demonic*. Baltimore, 1984, chapter 4.
- Deats, Sara Munson. *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. Newark, Del., 1997.
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- Giamatti, A. Bartlett. 'Marlowe: the arts of illusion'. *YR* 61 (1972), 530-43.
- Grantley, Darryl and Peter Roberts, eds. *Christopher Marlowe and English Renaissance Culture*. Aldershot, 1996.
- Hattaway, Michael. 'The theology of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*'. *RenD* n.s. 3 (1970), 51-78.
- Healy, Thomas F. *Christopher Marlowe*. Plymouth, 1994.
- Hopkins, Lisa. *Christopher Marlowe: A Literary Life*. Basingstoke, 2000.
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- Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Christopher Marlowe, 1946-1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 6. London, 1967.
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- Wilson, F. P. *Marlowe and the Early Shakespeare*. Oxford, 1953.
- Wilson, Richard, ed. *Christopher Marlowe*. Longman Critical Readers. London, 1999.

Marmion, Shackerly (1603–1639)

Born January 1603, Brackley, Northamptonshire. Educated at Thame free school under Richard Burcher; commoner of Wadham College, Oxford 1618; proceeded BA 1621/2 and MA 1624. In Low Countries as soldier 1625. Gained reputation as writer of three plays; Charles I is said to have liked his work. Plays acted by Prince Charles's servants and by the Queen's Men at Salisbury Court, the Cockpit, and at court. With Jonson, Drayton, Heywood and others, contributed to *Annalia Dubrensis* (1636) honouring the Cotswold Games. Died January 1639; buried in St Bartholomew, Smithfield, London.

Works:

Maidment, James and W. H. Logan, eds. *The Dramatic Works of Shakerly Marmion*. Edinburgh, 1875.

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Study:

Davis, Joe Lee. *The Sons of Ben: Jonsonian Comedy in Caroline England*. Detroit, 1967.

Marston, John (1576–1634)

Baptized 7 October 1576, Wardington, Oxfordshire; of prominent Shropshire family. Brasenose College, Oxford 1592–4; BA 1594. Resident in the Middle Temple by 1595. Began writing during early years there, publishing erotic and satirical poems as 'W. Kinsayder'. Start of dramatic career coincides with prohibition of non-dramatic satire (June 1599) and public burning of Marston's poems, among others. Mentioned by Henslowe 1599, but majority of plays written for various children's companies; may have been sharer in Children of Queen's Revels at Blackfriars c. 1604–8. Abandoned the stage after 1608, having been briefly imprisoned in Newgate, apparently for writing or producing a play that offended James I. Took orders 1609, eventually becoming incumbent of Christchurch, Hampshire, 1616–31. Died 25 June 1634, Aldermanbury, London. Buried next to his father in Middle Temple, under a stone bearing the now-destroyed epitaph *Oblivioni Sacrum* ['sacred to oblivion'].

Works:

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Studies:

Axelrad, A. José. *Un malcontent élizabéthain: John Marston (1576–1634)*. Paris, 1955.

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Ingram, R. W. *John Marston*. Boston, Mass., 1978.

Kaplan, Joel H. 'John Marston's *Fawn*: a saturnalian satire'. *SEL* 9 (1969), 335–50.

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Scott, Michael. *John Marston's Plays: Themes, Structure and Performances*. New York, 1978.

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Wharton, T. F. *The Critical Rise and Fall of John Marston*. Columbia, S.C., 1994.
Wharton, T. F., ed. *The Drama of John Marston: Critical Re-visions*. Cambridge, 2000.

Massinger, Philip (1583–1640)

Son of Arthur Massinger, who had served as steward and man of business to Henry Herbert, second Earl of Pembroke; baptized at Salisbury 24 November 1583. Served as page at Wilton, and attended Salisbury School. Left St Alban Hall, Oxford, 1606 without taking a degree. Maintained links with Herbert family; Philip, Earl of Montgomery and later (1630) fourth Earl of Pembroke became chief patron. Although treats Catholicism sympathetically in his plays, political allegiances seem to have been more with 'puritans' and parliamentarians. Worked for King's Men (1616–23); later joint author of plays with Daborne, Field, and Fletcher. After Fletcher's death, the leading playwright of his time. Buried at St Saviour's, Southwark, 18 March 1640.

Works:

- Edwards, Philip and Colin Gibson, eds. *The Plays and Poems of Philip Massinger*. 5 vols. Oxford, 1976.

Studies:

- Ball, Robert H. *The Amazing Career of Sir Giles Overreach*. Princeton, 1939.
Bamford, Karen. 'Sexual Violence in *The Queen of Corinth*' in *Other Voices, Other Views* – see under John Fletcher.
Butler, Martin. 'Massinger's *City Madam* and the Caroline audience'. *RenD* n.s. 13 (1982), 157–87.
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Professional Playwrights... – see under Richard Brome.
Clubb, Louise George. '*The Virgin Martyr* and the Tragedia Sacra'. *RenD* 7 (1964), 103–26.
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Sanders, Julie. – *see under* Richard Brome.

Thomson, Patricia. 'The Old Way and the New Way in Dekker and Massinger'. *MLR* 51 (1956), 168–78.

Turner, Robert Y. 'Giving and taking in Massinger's tragicomedies'. *SEL* 35 (1995), 361–81.

Middleton, Thomas (1580–1627)

Son of prosperous London bricklayer and builder who had a coat of arms. Attended Queen's College, Oxford, although may not have graduated. Wrote *The Wisdom of Solomon Paraphrased* (1597) as well as prose satires. Henslowe records his writing for Worcester's Men and for the Admiral's Men 1602. By that year and until 1607 wrote also for Paul's Boys. Collaborated with Rowley, Munday, Drayton, Webster, and Dekker, and may later have co-written or added to *Timon of Athens*. From 1604 to 1611 wrote city comedies; from 1613 to 1618 concentrated on tragicomedies, and from 1618 on tragedies. From 1607 to 1616 was writing city pageants and masques. Chronologer to the City 1620. *A Game at Chess* (1624) very popular and caused political furore. Buried at Newington Butts, 4 July 1627.

Works:

Bullen, A. H., ed. *The Works of Thomas Middleton*. 8 vols. London, 1885–6.

Studies:

For studies of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, see those listed under Tourneur.

Barker, R. H. *Thomas Middleton*. New York, 1958.

Bawcutt, N. W. 'Was Thomas Middleton a puritan dramatist?', *MLR* 94 (1999), 925–39.

Braunmuller, A. R. "'To the Globe I rowed": John Holles sees *A Game at Chess*'. *ELR* 20 (1990), 340–56.

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Christensen, Ann C. 'Settling house in Middleton's *Women Beware Women*'. *CompD* 29 (1995–6), 493–518.

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- Friedenreich, K., ed. *'Accompaning the Players': Essays Celebrating Thomas Middleton 1586-1980*. New York, 1982.
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- Heinemann, Margot. *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts*. Cambridge, 1980.
- Heller, Herbert Jack. *Penitent Brothellers: Grace, Sexuality and Genre in Thomas Middleton's City Comedies*. Newark, Del., 2000.
- Holmes, David M. *The Art of Thomas Middleton*. London, 1970.
- Howard-Hill, T. H. *Middleton's 'Vulgar Pasquin': Essays on 'A Game at Chess'*. Newark, Del., 1995.
- Jowett, John. 'Middleton's *No Wit at the Fortune*'. *RenD* n.s. 22 (1991), 191-208.
- Jump, J. D. 'Middleton's tragedies' in Boris Ford, ed., *The Age of Shakespeare*. Rev. edn, Harmondsworth, 1982, pp. 457-70.
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- Levin, Richard. 'The Dampit scenes in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*'. *MLQ* 25 (1964), 140-52.
- Levin, Richard. 'The three quarrels of *A Fair Quarrel*'. *SP* 61 (1964), 219-31.
- Malcolmson, Cristina. '"As tame as ladies": politics and gender in *The Changeling*'. *ELR* 20 (1990), 320-39.
- Mount, David B. '"The (un)reclaymed forme" of Middleton's *A Trick to Catch the Old One*'. *SEL* 31 (1991), 259-72.
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- Taylor, Gary. 'Forms of opposition: Shakespeare and Middleton'. *ELR* 24 (1994), 283-314.
- White, Martin. *Middleton and Tourneur*. New York, 1992.
- Yachnin, Paul. 'The politics of theatrical mirth: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *A Mad World, My Masters*, and *Measure for Measure*'. *SQ* 43 (1992), 51-66.
- Stage-wrights: Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton, and the Making of Theatrical Value*. Philadelphia, 1997.

Munday, Anthony (1560-1633)

Son of London draper. Apprenticed to stationer John Alde who went out of business in 1582, before apprenticeship was complete; freeman of Drapers' Company, 1585. In Rome 1578, seeking information about Roman Catholics at the English College. Actor with Oxford's company and Pembroke's company 1598. For Admiral's company wrote seventeen plays from 1594 to 1602, often in collaboration; most are lost. Meres in 1598 called him one of 'the best for comedy' and 'our best plotter'. Probably

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collaborated on *Sir Thomas More* (c. 1593) with Shakespeare and others. Satirized as Antonio Balladino in Jonson's *The Case is Altered* (1598) and as Posthaste in *Histriomastix* (1599?). Wrote pageants and entertainments for the city from 1605 as well as collection of romances. Used pseudonym Lazarus Piot. Friend of John Stowe and brought out posthumous edition of his *Survey of London*. Buried 10 August 1633, at St Stephen's, Coleman Street.

Works:

- Hosley, Richard, ed. *Fedele and Fortunio*. New York and London, 1981.
Meagher, John C., ed. *The Huntingdon Plays... The Downfall and the Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*. New York and London, 1980.
Pennell, Arthur E., ed. *John a Kent and John a Cumber*. New York and London, 1980.

Studies:

- Champion, Larry S. – see under Michael Drayton.
Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Minor Elizabethans, Roger Ascham 1946–1966... Anthony Munday, 1941–1966*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 9. London, 1968.
Mann, David. 'Sir Oliver Owlet's Men: fact or fiction?' *HLQ* 54 (1991), 301–11.
Singman, Jeffrey L. 'Munday's unruly earl' in Lois Potter, ed., *Playing Robin Hood: The Legend as Performance in Five Centuries*. Newark, Del., 1998, pp. 63–76.
Turner, Celeste. *Anthony Munday, an Elizabethan Man of Letters*. Berkeley, Calif., 1928.

Nabbes, Thomas (fl. 1638; d. 1645)

Native of Worcestershire; entered Exeter College, Oxford, thence into service with Worcestershire families. From 1630 in London; friend of Inns of Court men and of Shackerly Marmion. Wrote plays for the Queen's company, generally performed at Salisbury Court. Wrote city comedies, a tragedy, masques (including *Microcosmos* and *Spring's Glory*), which were published beginning in 1637. A collection of poems published 1639. One of the 'Sons of Ben' [Jonson].

Works:

- Bullen, A. H., ed. *The Works of Thomas Nabbes*. 2 vols. London, 1882–9.

Study:

- Vince, R. W. 'Thomas Nabbes and the professional drama 1630–1642'. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 1968.

Nashe, Thomas (1567–> 1601)

A minister's son, baptized at Lowestoft, Suffolk, November 1567. Matriculated St John's College, Cambridge, 1582. BA 1586. Left university 1588, from which time he produced a succession of books and witty pamphlets, containing criticism of actors and scholar Gabriel Harvey. Possibly, with Lyly, contributed to the anti-episcopalian

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tracts of 'Martin Marprelate'. Of the circle of 'University Wits', and was patronized by various members of the aristocracy and by Archbishop Whitgift. In 1597 collaboration with Jonson on the *Isle of Dogs* gave political offence; in *Lenten Stuff* (1599) charged that Jonson's part of the play had caused all the trouble. *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592), which was probably performed at Archbishop Whitgift's palace at Croydon, is only extant complete play.

Works:

McKerrow, R. B., ed. *The Works of Thomas Nashe*. Rev. edn, F. P. Wilson. 5 vols. Oxford, 1958.

Studies:

- Axton, Marie. 'Summer's Last Will and Testament: Revel's End' in John Guy, ed., *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*. Cambridge, 1995, pp. 258–73.
- Geller, Sherri. 'Commentary as cover-up: criticizing illiberal patronage in Thomas Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament*'. *ELR* 25 (1995), 148–78.
- Hibbard, G. R. *Thomas Nashe: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge, Mass., 1962.
- Hilliard, Stephen S. *The Singularity of Thomas Nashe*. Lincoln, Nebr., 1986.
- Hutson, Lorna. *Nashe in Context*. Oxford, 1988.
- Johnson, Robert C., ed. *Robert Greene, 1945–1965 ... Thomas Nashe, 1941–65 ... George Peele, 1939–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographical Supplements 5. London, 1968.
- Mosley, Michael E. 'Seasons of fidelity and infidelity in *Summer's Last Will and Testament* by Thomas Nashe'. *Imaginaires* 1 (1996), 37–48.

Norton, Thomas (1532–1584)

Born in London, son of a wealthy grocer, educated Cambridge and Inner Temple. Remembrancer of City of London and MP for London 1571. A Calvinist and opposed to public stage. 1583 accused of treason. *Gorboduc* or *Ferrex and Porrex*, written in collaboration with Thomas Sackville (*q.v.*), is his only extant play and the first tragedy in blank verse. First performed at the Inner Temple on 6 January 1562. Some of his poems included in Tottel's *Songes and Sonnettes* (1557).

Work:

Cauthen, Irby B., ed. 'Gorboduc' or, 'Ferrex and Porrex'. Lincoln, Nebr., 1970.

Studies:

- Clemen, W. H. *English Tragedy before Shakespeare: The Development of Dramatic Speech*, trans. T. S. Dorsch. London, 1961.
- Walker, Greg. *The Politics of Performance in Early Renaissance Drama*. Cambridge, 1998.
- See also Thomas Sackville.

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Peele, George (1558?–1597?)

Son of James Peele, salter and clerk of Christ's Hospital, himself a writer of pageants. Educated at Christ's Hospital and Broadgates Hall and Christ Church, Oxford. BA 1577, MA 1579. A player himself; in 1583 arranged performances of plays by William Gager at Oxford, then probably returned to London and associated with Greene in circle of 'University Wits' (see Greene's *Groats-worth of Wit* [1592]). Worked with the Lord Admiral's company, later the Queen's Men and the Chapel Royal. Many of his plays lost. Wrote pageants as well as five extant plays. His name attached to other lost texts and his authorship detected in others. Died of smallpox.

Works:

Prouty, C. T., gen. ed. *The Life and Works of George Peele*. 3 vols. New Haven, Conn., 1952–70.

Studies:

Ashley, L. R. *George Peele*. New York, 1970.

Bradley, David. *From Text to Performance in the Elizabethan Theatre: Preparing the Play for the Stage*. Cambridge, 1992, pp. 127–74.

Braunmuller, A. R. 'Characterization through language in the early plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries' in K. Muir *et al.*, eds., *Shakespeare: Man of the Theatre*. Newark, Del., 1982, pp. 128–47.

George Peele. Boston, Mass., 1983.

Donovan, Kevin J. 'Recent Studies in George Peele (1969–1990)'. *ELR* 23 (1993), 212–20.

Ewbank (née Ekeblad), Inga-Stina. 'The House of David in Renaissance drama: a comparative study'. *RenD* 8 (1965), 3–40.

"'What words, what looks, what wonders?': language and spectacle in the theatre of George Peele" in G. R. Hibbard, ed., *The Elizabethan Theatre* V. Hamden, Conn., 1975, pp. 124–54.

Johnson, Robert C., ed. – *see under* Robert Greene.

Jones, Gwenan. 'The intention of Peele's "Old Wives' Tale"'. *Aberystwyth Studies* 7 (1925) 79–93.

McMillin, Scott and Sally-Beth MacLean. *The Queen's Men and their Plays*. Cambridge, 1998, pp. 122–53.

Montrose, Louis A. 'Gifts and reasons: the contexts of Peele's *Araynement of Paris*'. *ELH* 47 (1980), 433–61.

Senn, Werner. – *see under* Robert Greene.

Von Hendy, Andrew. 'The triumph of chastity: form and meaning in *The Arraignment of Paris*'. *RenD* n.s. 1 (1968), 87–101.

Porter, Henry (fl. 1596; d. 1599)

Payments recorded to him in Henslowe's diary on account of Admiral's Men 1596–7. Meres names him 'the best for comedy amongst us' (*Palladis Tamia*, 1598). Not traceable after 1599, and *The Two Angry Women of Abington* his only extant play. Stabbed to death by the playwright John Day.

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Works:

Jardine, Michael and John Simons, eds. *The Two Angry Women of Abington*. Nottingham, 1987.

Studies:

Nosworthy, J. M. 'Notes on Henry Porter'. *MLR* 35 (1940), 517–21.
'Henry Porter'. *English* 6 (1946), 65–9.

Preston, Thomas (>1569–1589<)

Educated Eton and King's College, Cambridge. Played there in *Dido* before the Queen and was awarded pension of £20 p.a. Fellow of King's until 1581. 1584 Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge; 1589 Vice-Chancellor. E. K. Chambers considers it 'incredible' that such a scholar could have been responsible for his only extant play, *Cambises* (printed 1569–70). Some of his ballads published as broadsides.

Work:

Johnson, R. C., ed. *A Critical Edition of Thomas Preston's 'Cambises'*. Salzburg, 1975.

Studies:

Bushnell, Rebecca. 'Tyranny and effeminacy in Early Modern England' in Mario Di Cesare, ed., *Reconsidering the Renaissance: Papers from the Twenty-First Annual Conference*. Binghamton, N.Y., 1992, pp. 339–54.
Hill, Eugene D. 'The first Elizabethan tragedy: a contextual reading of *Cambises*'. *SP* 89 (1992), 404–33.
Norland, Howard B. "'Lamentable tragedy mixed ful of pleasant mirth": the enigma of *Cambises*'. *CompD* 26 (1992–3), 330–43.

Rowley, William (?–1626)

Little known of his early life except associated with Queen Anne's Men in 1607. Wrote plays for Duke of York's Men from 1610–15. Acted and wrote for Princess Elizabeth's Men 1615–19, collaborating with Middleton, Massinger, Ford, Dekker, Webster, and Heywood until 1621. Later wrote for Lady Elizabeth's Men at the Cockpit, and wrote and acted for the King's Men from 1623. Name attached to some fifty plays, including *The Birth of Merlin* (published 1662) where he is listed as collaborating with Shakespeare. His death is alluded to in Jonson's *Staple of News*.

Works:

Udall, Joanna, ed. *A Critical Old-Spelling Edition of 'The Birth of Merlin'*. London, 1991.

See also under Middleton and Rowley's other collaborators.

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Studies:

- Grinnell, Richard W. 'Naming and social disintegration in *The Witch of Edmonton*'. *Essays in Theatre* 16 (1998), 209–23.
- Healy, Thomas. 'Selves, states, and sectarianism in early modern England'. *English* 44 (1995), 193–213.
- Stock, C. W. *William Rowley, his 'All's Lost by Lust'*. University of Pennsylvania Publications, Series in Literature and Philology 13 (1910).

Sackville, Thomas (1536–1608)

Son of Sir Richard Sackville, first cousin of Anne Boleyn. Perhaps educated at Hart Hall, Oxford, and St John's College, Cambridge. A barrister at Inner Temple. Wrote Induction to the *Mirror for Magistrates* (1559–63) and the section devoted to Buckingham. Became Lord Buckhurst in 1567 and Earl of Dorset in 1604. Lord Treasurer under both Elizabeth I and James I. With Thomas Norton (q.v.) wrote *Gorboduc*.

Works:

See under Thomas Norton.

Studies:

- Bacquet, P. *Un contemporain d'Elisabeth I: T. Sackville, l'homme et l'œuvre*. Geneva, 1966.
- Jones, Norman and Paul Whitfield White. 'Gorboduc and royal marriage politics: an Elizabethan player's report of the premiere performance'. *ELR* 26 (1996), 3–16.
- Swart, J. *Thomas Sackville*. Groningen, 1949.

Shakespeare, William (1564–1616)

See:

- De Grazia, Margreta and Stanley Wells, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Cambridge, 2001.
- Dobson, Michael and Stanley Wells, eds. *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford, 2001.
- Hattaway, Michael, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's History Plays*. Cambridge, 2002.
- Kastan, David Scott, ed. *A Companion to Shakespeare*. Oxford, 1999.
- Leggatt, Alexander, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*. Cambridge, 2001.
- McEachern, Claire, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*. Cambridge, 2003.
- Wells, Stanley, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*. Cambridge, 1986.
- Wells, Stanley, ed. *Shakespeare: A Bibliographical Guide*. New edn. Oxford, 1990.
- Wells, Stanley, and Sarah Stanton, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Stage*. Cambridge, 2002.

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Sharpham, Edward (1576–1608)

Born East Allington, Devonshire. Entered Middle Temple 1594 and died, probably of plague, the day after he made his will (22 April 1608). Wrote *The Flee* and *Cupid's Whirligig*, which were performed by Children of the Revels at Blackfriars. Drummond noted that Jonson considered Sharpham, Day, Dekker, and Minshew all to be rogues.

Works:

Petter, Christopher Gordon, ed. *A Critical Old Spelling Edition of the Works of Edward Sharpham*. New York, 1986.

Shirley, James (1596–1666)

A Londoner by birth, educated at Merchant Taylors' School then St John's College, Oxford, and St Catherine's College, Cambridge. 1618 published a poem, 'Eccho'. Sometime Anglican clergyman in Hertfordshire, and, after converting to Catholicism, schoolmaster. Patronized by Queen Henrietta Maria and associated with Massinger, Ford, and others. Managed Werburgh St Theatre in Dublin. Succeeded Massinger as principal dramatist of the King's Men 1640. Accompanied his patron Newcastle in campaigns of 1642–4. His *Poems* (1646) appeared under the patronage of Thomas Stanley. Prefatory epistle to the Beaumont and Fletcher first folio (1647) testifies to his admiration for those dramatists. Died soon after Great Fire of London.

Works:

Gifford, William and Alexander Dyce, eds. *The Dramatic Works and Poems of James Shirley*. 6 vols. London, 1833. Reprinted, New York, 1966.

Studies:

Bas, G. *James Shirley, 1596–1666: dramaturge caroléen*. Service de reproduction des thèses, Université de Lille III. Lille, 1973.

Burks, Deborah G. "This sight doth shake all that is man within me": sexual violation and the rhetoric of dissent in *The Cardinal*. *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 26 (1996), 153–90.

Burner, Sandra A. *James Shirley: A Study of Literary Coteries and Patronage in Seventeenth-Century England*. London, 1989.

Clark, Ira. – see under Richard Brome.

Forsythe, R. S. *The Relations of Shirley's Plays to the Elizabethan Drama*. New York, 1914. Reprinted, New York, 1965.

Gaby, Rosemary. 'Of vagabonds and commonwealths: *Beggars' Bush*, *A Jovial Crew*, and *The Sisters*'. *SEL* 34 (1994), 401–24.

Lucow, B. *James Shirley*. Boston, Mass., 1981.

Morton, Richard. 'Deception and social dislocation: an aspect of James Shirley's drama'. *RenD* 9 (1966), 227–46.

Reed, Robert R., Jr. 'James Shirley and the sentimental comedy'. *Anglia* 73 (1955), 149–70.

Biographies and select bibliography

- Sensabaugh, G. F. 'Platonic love in Shirley's *The Lady of Pleasure*' in *A Tribute to George Coffin Taylor*, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1952, pp. 168–77.
- Walker, Kim. 'New prison: representing the female actor in Shirley's *The Bird in a Cage*'. *ELR* 21 (1991), 385–400.
- Wertheim, Albert. 'Games and courtship in James Shirley's *Hyde Park*'. *Anglia* 90 (1972), 71–91.
- Zimmer, Ruth. *James Shirley: A Reference Guide*. Boston, Mass., 1980.

Suckling, Sir John (1600–1641)

Son of James I's Comptroller, and educated at Trinity College, Cambridge. Admitted to Gray's Inn and inherited large estates from his father. A royalist who wrote plays as well as lyric poetry and is said to have invented cribbage. Financed lavish production of his own play, *Aglaura* (1637). One of the 'Sons of Ben' [Jonson]. After initiating abortive 'first army plot', fled to Paris where, according to Aubrey, he committed suicide.

Works:

Beaurline, L. A. and T. Clayton, eds. *The Works of Sir John Suckling*. 2 vols. Oxford, 1971.

Studies:

- Lawrence, W. J. 'On the underrated genius of Dick Tarleton' in *Speeding up Shakespeare*. London, 1937, pp. 17–38.
- Squire, C. L. *Sir John Suckling*. Boston, Mass., 1978.
- Thomson, Peter. 'The true physiognomy of a man: Richard Tarlton and his legend'. *Parergon* 14 (1997), 29–50.

Tomkis, Thomas (? 1580–? 1634)

Entered Trinity College, Cambridge, 1597. BA 1600, MA and fellow of the college 1604. Probably wrote *Lingua* (1603?) as well as *Albumazar* (1615) for college performances (the latter was performed before the King), both founded on Italian models.

Works:

- Dick, Hugh G., ed. *Albumazar, a Comedy (1615) by Thomas Tomkis*. University of California Publications in English 13. Berkeley, 1944.
- Lingua*. Tudor Facsimile Texts. London, 1913.

Tourneur, Cyril (died 1626)

Date and place of birth obscure. Only *The Atheist's Tragedy* (c. 1611) can be confidently attributed to him; author of occasional and satirical poems 1605–13. Employed in the Netherlands 1613, and as Sir Edward Cecil's secretary in the unsuccessful Cadiz expedition, 1625. Ill, he was put ashore in Ireland, where he died. Although much

Biographies and select bibliography

recent scholarship points to Middleton as author of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, critical essays on that play are listed here.

Works:

Parfitt, George, ed. *The Plays of Cyril Tourneur*. Cambridge, 1978.

Studies:

Coddon, Karin S. "‘For show or useless property’: necrophilia and *The Revenger's Tragedy*". *ELH* 61 (1994), 71–88.

Dollimore, Jonathan. 'Two concepts of mimesis: Renaissance literary theory and *The Revenger's Tragedy*' in James Redmond, ed., *Themes in Drama*. 2. *Drama and Mimesis*. Cambridge, 1980, pp. 25–50.

Donovan, Dennis, ed. *Thomas Dekker, 1945–1965 . . . Cyril Tourneur, 1945–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 2. London, 1967.

Foakes, R. A. 'The art of cruelty: Hamlet and Vindice'. *ShS* 26 (1973), 21–32.
Marston and Tourneur. Harlow, 1978.

Hattaway, Michael. 'Fleshing his will in the spoil of her honour: desire, misogyny and the perils of chivalry'. *ShS* 46 (1994), 121–36.

Kaufmann, R. J. 'Theodicy, tragedy and the Psalmist: Tourneur's *Atheist's Tragedy*'. *CompD* 3 (1969–70), 241–62.

McMillin, Scott. 'Acting and violence: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and its departures from *Hamlet*'. *SEL* 24 (1984), 275–91.

Neill, Michael. 'Bastardy, counterfeiting, and misogyny in *The Revenger's Tragedy*'. *Studies in English Literature* (Tokyo), 36 (1996), 397–416.

Mullaney, Steven. 'Mourning and misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the final progress of Elizabeth I, 1600–1607'. *SQ* 45 (1994), 139–62.

Murray, P. B. *A Study of Cyril Tourneur*. Philadelphia, 1964.

Salinger, L. G. 'Tourneur and the tragedy of revenge' in Boris Ford, ed., *The Age of Shakespeare*, rev. edn, Harmondsworth, 1982, pp. 436–56.

Schuman, S. *Cyril Tourneur*. Boston, Mass., 1977.

Tucker, Kenneth. *A Bibliography of . . . John Ford and Cyril Tourneur*. Boston, Mass., 1977.

Townshend, Aurelian (fl. 1601–1643)

Steward to Robert Cecil, friend of Jonson and Herbert. Enjoyed high literary reputation at court of Charles I. Wrote masques and poems, succeeding Jonson as court masque writer about 1632.

Works:

Brown, Cedric C., ed. *Poems and Masques of Aurelian Townshend*. Reading, 1983.

Study:

Butler, Martin – see under William Davenant.

Biographies and select bibliography

Udall, Nicholas (1505–1556)

Born in Hampshire, educated at Winchester College, 1517, and Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he became a fellow in 1524. In 1526 suspected of Lutheranism. Headmaster of Eton in 1534 but was dismissed for (homosexual?) misconduct 1541. Perhaps *Ralph Roister Doister* (printed 1566) was acted by Eton boys before then. Held various ecclesiastical offices before his death (headmaster of Winchester from 1554) and also published scholarly and theological works.

Works:

Whitworth, C. W., ed. *Three Sixteenth-Century Comedies*. London, 1984.

Studies:

Egerton, William L. *Nicholas Udall*. New York, 1965.

Pittenger, Elizabeth. “‘To serve the queere’: Nicholas Udall, Master of Revels” in Jonathan Goldberg, ed., *Queering the Renaissance*. Durham, N.C., 1994, pp. 162–89.

Plumstead, A. W. ‘Satirical parody in *Roister Doister*: a reinterpretation’. *SP* 60 (1963), 141–54.

Rutledge, Douglas F. ‘*Respublica*: rituals of status elevation and the political mythology of Mary Tudor’. *MARDIE* 5 (1991), 55–68.

Walker, Greg. – see under Thomas Norton.

Wager, W[illiam?] (c. 1559)

Nothing is known of him except for his authorship of two Protestant morality plays.

Works:

Benbow, R. Mark, ed. ‘*The Longer thou Livest*’; and ‘*Enough is as Good as a Feast*’. London, 1968.

Webster, John (?1580–1625)

Son of wealthy coach-maker who worked near Fortune and Red Bull play-houses. Educated at Merchant Taylors’ school and Middle Temple. Wrote tragedies alone and collaborated with many contemporaries (Drayton, Munday, Middleton, Dekker, Heywood, etc.) as well as writing occasional verse. Worked with others on ‘Monuments of Honour’, the Lord Mayor’s pageant of 1624.

Works:

Gunby, David, David Carnegie, and Antony Hammond, eds. *The Works of John Webster*, vol. 1: *The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi*. Cambridge, 1995.

- Gunby, David, David Carnegie, and MacDonald P. Jackson, eds. *The Works of John Webster*, vol. II: *The Devil's Law Case, A Cure for a Cuckold, and Appius and Virginia*. Cambridge, 2003.
- Lucas, F. L., ed. *The Complete Works of John Webster*. 4 vols. Rev. edn, London, 1958.

Studies:

- Berry, Ralph. *The Art of John Webster*. Oxford, 1972.
- Bliss, Lee. *The World's Perspective: John Webster and the Jacobean Drama*. New Brunswick, N.J., 1983.
- Bogard, Travis. *The Tragic Satire of John Webster*. Berkeley, Calif., 1955.
- Bradbrook, M. C. *John Webster: Citizen and Dramatist*. London, 1980.
- Bromley, Laura G. 'The rhetoric of feminine identity in *The White Devil*' in Dorothea Kehler and Susan Baker, eds., *In Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Drama*. Metuchen, N.J., 1991, pp. 50–70.
- Brown, John Russell. 'Techniques of restoration: the case of *The Duchess of Malfi*' in Jay L. Halio and Hugh Richmond, eds., *Shakespearean Illuminations: Essays in Honor of Marvin Rosenberg*. Newark, Del., 1998, pp. 317–35.
- Calderwood, James L. 'The Duchess of Malfi: styles of ceremony'. *ELH* 12 (1962), 133–47.
- Callaghan, Dymphna, ed. *The Duchess of Malfi*. New Casebooks. New York, 1998.
- Coddon, Karin S. 'The Duchess of Malfi: tyranny and spectacle in Jacobean drama' in James Redmond, ed., *Madness in Drama*. Cambridge, 1993, pp. 1–17.
- Dent, R. W. *John Webster's Borrowing*. Berkeley, Calif., 1960.
- Donovan, Dennis, ed. *Thomas Middleton, 1939–1965; John Webster, 1940–1965*. Elizabethan Bibliographies Supplements 1. London, 1967.
- Ekeblad, Inga-Stina. 'Webster's constructional rhythm'. *ELH* 24 (1957), 165–76.
- 'The "impure art" of John Webster'. *RES* 9 (1958), 235–67.
- Enterline, Lynn. 'Hair on the in-side': *The Duchess of Malfi* and the body of lycanthropy'. *YJC* 7 (1994), 85–129.
- Finin-Farber, Kathryn. 'Framing (the) woman: *The White Devil* and the deployment of law'. *RenD* n.s. 25 (1994), 219–45.
- Forker, C. R. *The Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster*. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Ill., 1986.
- Gunby, D. C. 'The Devil's Law Case: an interpretation'. *MLR* 63 (1968), 545–58.
- Haslem, Lori-Schroeder. '"Troubled with the mother?" Longings, purgings, and the maternal body in *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Duchess of Malfi*'. *MP* 92 (1995), 438–59.
- Henderson, Andrea. 'Death on the stage, death of the stage: the antitheatricity of *The Duchess of Malfi*'. *Theatre Journal* 42 (1990), 194–207.
- Hunter, G. K. 'Rhetoric and Renaissance drama' in Peter Mack, ed., *Renaissance Rhetoric*. New York, 1994, pp. 103–18.
- Hunter, G. K. and S. K. Hunter, eds. *John Webster: A Critical Anthology*. Harmondsworth, 1969.
- Jankowski, Theodora A. 'Defining/confining the Duchess: negotiating the female body in John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*'. *SP* 87 (1990), 221–45.

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- Lagard, F. *John Webster*. 2 vols. Toulouse, 1968.
Morris, Brian, ed. *John Webster*. London, 1970.
Murray, Peter B. *A Study of John Webster*. The Hague, 1969.
Pearson, Jacqueline. *Tragedy and Tragicomedie in the Plays of John Webster*. Manchester, 1980.
Rowe, Katherine. *Dead Hands: Fictions of Agency, Renaissance to Modern*. Stanford, Calif., 1999, chapter 3.
Steen, Sara Jayne. 'The crime of marriage: Arabella Stuart and *The Duchess of Malfi*'. *Sixteenth Century Journal* 22 (1991), 61–76.
Weil, Judith. 'The White Devil and old wives' tales'. *MLR* 94 (1999), 328–40.
Wiggins, Martin. 'Conjuring the ghosts of *The White Devil*'. *RES* 48 (1997), 448–70.
Wymer, Roland. – see under John Ford.

Whetstone, George (? 1544–? 1587)

A Londoner who, after spending patrimony in riotous living, served in the Netherlands against the Spanish, 1572–4. Wrote prose translations, pamphlets, occasional verse, and the two-part *Promos and Cassandra* (1578), the plot of which resembles that of *Measure for Measure*.

Work:

Promos and Cassandra. Tudor Facsimile Texts. London, 1907.

Study:

Izard, T. C. *George Whetstone: Mid-Elizabethan Man of Letters*. New York, 1942.

Wilkins, George (fl. 1604–1608)

Nothing is known except that he wrote pamphlets and plays for the King's and Queen Anne's Men. Only extant play is *The Miserie of Enforced Marriage*. Parts of *Pericles* have been ascribed to him (he certainly wrote a novella, *The Painful Adventures of Pericles* [1608]) and most studies concentrate on editorial and bibliographical matters.

Work:

The Miserie of Enforced Marriage. Malone Society Reprint. Oxford, 1963.

Wilson, Robert (> 1572–1600)

There may have been more than one dramatist of this name, attached to a handful of plays and various collaborations. Probably a member of Leicester's company c. 1572–81, served with Tarlton in the Queen's Men 1583–c. 1586, later joining Lord Strange's Men. May have written a *Catiline* play with Chettle.

Biographies and select bibliography

Works:

The Cobbler's Prophecy. Tudor Facsimile Texts. London, 1911.

The Three Ladies of London. Tudor Facsimile Texts. London, 1911.

The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London. Tudor Facsimile Texts. London, 1912.

Wilson, Robert and H. S. D. Mithal. 'An Edition of Robert Wilson's *Three Ladies of London* and *Three Lords and Three Ladies of London*'. PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1959. New York, 1988.

Studies:

Cameron, G. M. *Robert Wilson and the Plays of Shakespeare*. Riverton, New Zealand, 1982.

McMillin, Scott and Sally-Beth MacLean. *The Queen's Men and their Plays*. Cambridge, 1998, pp. 121–54.

Woodes, Nathaniel (?)

Norwich minister, and author of a Protestant allegory, *The Conflict of Conscience* (>1581).

Work:

The Conflict of Conscience. Malone Society Reprint. Oxford, 1952.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

This is a full but not complete list of plays. It does not contain entertainments, pageants, masques, school plays, or Latin academic plays. Titles are not always given in full. Moreover space does not permit even a partial account of either textual revisions or early theatrical history: dates given are those of composition or first performance – no attempt is made to distinguish between these (asterisked titles can be dated only approximately), revivals and adaptations are not listed and revisions, authorized and unauthorized, are not noted here. When a play is attributed to a particular company, that is the first company which is known to have performed it but not necessarily the company which performed it first; companies associated with a play's subsequent history are not listed. Collaborators are not always listed where the nature of multiple authorship is uncertain. The list does not include plays the texts of which have not survived. For further reference see A. Harbage (rev. S. Schoenbaum and Sylvia Wagonheim), *Annals of English Drama 975-1700*, London, 1989.

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1485				Accession of Henry VII
1497	H. Medwall	<i>Fulgens and Lucrece</i>	Morton's House	
1509				Accession of Henry VIII
1513	Anon.	* <i>Hick Scorner</i>	?	
1520	John Heywood?	* <i>The Four P's</i>	?	Field of the Cloth of Gold
		* <i>Johan Johan</i>	?	(meeting of Henry VIII and François I)
		* <i>The Pardoner and the Friar</i>	?	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	Anon.	* <i>Andria</i>	Closet	
	Anon.	* <i>Johan the Evangelist</i>	?	
1521	J. Skelton	* <i>Magnificence</i>	?	Diet of Worms condemns Luther for heresy
1527	J. Rastell	* <i>Calisto and Melebea</i>	?	
1528	John Heywood	* <i>The Play of the Weather</i>	?	
1530	Anon.	* <i>Pater, Filius, et Uxor</i>	?	
1533				Act in Restraint of Appeals (severing English ecclesiastical courts from Rome)
1534				Act of Supremacy
1535	Anon.	* <i>Temperance and Humility</i>	?	Thomas More executed
1536				Pilgrimage of Grace
1538	J. Bale	<i>God's Promises</i>	St Stephen's, Canterbury	
		<i>1 and 2 King John</i>	St Stephen's, Canterbury	
		<i>The Temptation of our Lord</i>	St Stephen's, Canterbury	
		<i>Three Laws of Nature</i>	St Stephen's, Canterbury	
1540	D. Lindsay	<i>A Satire of the Three Estates</i>	Linlithgow, before James V	
	J. Palsgrave	<i>Acolastus</i>	Closet	
1547				Accession of Edward VI
1549				Book of Common Prayer; Kett's rebellion
1550	Anon.	* <i>Nice Wanton</i>	?	
1553	W. Stevenson (?)	* <i>Gammer Gurton's Needle</i>	Christ's College, Cambridge	Accession of Mary I

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1554	N. Udall (?)	<i>*Jacob and Esau</i>	?	Marriage of Mary to Philip II; persecution and burning of Protestants
1555	Anon.	<i>*Jack Juggler</i>	?	Worcester's Men become active
1556				Cranmer executed
1558				Accession of Elizabeth I
1559	Jasper Heywood	<i>Troas</i>	Closet	Warwick's Men become active;
	J. Phillip	<i>*Patient and Meek</i>	?	Act of Settlement
	W. Wager	<i>*The Longer thou Livest . . .</i>	?	
1560	Jasper Heywood	<i>Thyestes</i>	Closet	Geneva translation of Bible
	T. Ingelend	<i>*The Disobedient Child</i>	?	
	W. Wager	<i>*Enough is as Good as a Feast</i>	?	
1561	Jasper Heywood	<i>Hercules Furens</i>	Closet	
	T. Preston	<i>*Cambises</i>	Court?	
1562	T. Norton & T. Sackville	<i>Gorboduc</i>	Inner Temple	
1563	A. Neville	<i>Oedipus</i>	Closet	Derby's Men become active; 39 Articles define Anglican theology
1564	R. Blower	<i>*Appius and Virginia</i>	Westminster Boys (?)	Rich's Men become active
	J. Jeffere (?)	<i>*The Bugbears</i>	?	
1565	R. Edwards	<i>*Damon and Pithias</i>	Merton College, Oxford	
1566	G. Gascoigne	<i>Supposes</i>	Gray's Inn	
	G. Gascoigne & F. Kinwelmershe	<i>Jocasta</i>	Gray's Inn	
1567	J. Pickering	<i>Horestes</i>	Court (?)	Red Lion Playhouse built;
	J. Studley	<i>Hyppolytus</i>	Closet	O'Neill's rebellion in Ireland
	W. Wager (?)	<i>The Trial of Treasure</i>	?	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	R. Wilmot <i>et al.</i>	<i>*Gismond of Salerne</i>	Inner Temple	
1568	Anon.	<i>The Marriage of Wit and Science</i>	Court (?)	Mary, Queen of Scots, flees to north of England; Bishops' Bible
1569	U. Fulwell	<i>*Like Will to Like</i>	?	Sussex's Men become active;
	T. Garter	<i>*The Most Virtuous and Godly Susanna</i>	?	pro-Catholic Rising of the North
1570	T. Preston (?)	<i>*Clyomon and Clamydes</i>	?	Papal bull excommunicating Elizabeth
1571	A. Rudd <i>et al.</i>	<i>*Misogonus</i>	Trinity College, Cambridge	
	Anon.	<i>*New Custom</i>	?	
1572	N. Woodes	<i>*The Conflict of Conscience</i>	?	Massacre of St Bartholomew
1573				Leicester's Men become active
1575	G. Gascoigne	<i>The Glass of Government</i>	Closet	
	A. Golding	<i>Abraham's Sacrifice</i>	Closet	
1576	G. Wapull	<i>The Tide Tarrieth No Man</i>	?	The Theatre built
	Anon.	<i>Common Conditions</i>	?	
1577	T. Lupton	<i>*All for Money</i>	?	Strange's Men become active; first Blackfriars, Curtain, and, about this time, playhouse at Newington Butts built
1578	G. Whetstone	<i>1 & 2 Promos and Cassandra</i>	Unacted (?)	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1579	F. Merbury	<i>A Marriage Between Wit and Wisdom</i>	?	Elizabeth's marriage to Duc d'Anjou discussed; start of military involvement in Dutch rebellion against Spain
1580				Oxford's Men become active
1581	T. Newton G. Peele	<i>Thebais</i> * <i>The Arraignement of Paris</i>	? Chapel at Court	Campion executed
	R. Wilson	* <i>The Three Ladies of London</i>	?	
1582	Anon.	<i>The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune</i>	Derby's at Court	Chamberlain's Men become active
1583	T. Legge	* <i>Solymitana Clades</i>	?	Queen's Men become active
1584	J. Lyly	* <i>Campaspe</i> * <i>Sappho and Phao</i>	Oxford's Boys Oxford's Boys	Oxford's Boys at the Blackfriars; Oath of
	A. Munday	* <i>Fedele and Fortunio</i>	Court	Association to defend Elizabeth against native or foreign enemies
1585	J. Lyly	* <i>Gallathea</i>	Paul's	Admiral's Men become active
1586	C. Marlowe & T. Nashe Anon.	* <i>Dido, Queen of Carthage</i> * <i>The Famous Victories of Henry V</i>	Chapel (?) Queen's at Bull Inn	Babington Plot to free Mary, Queen of Scots; Battle of Zutphen
1587	Anon. R. Greene	* <i>Timon</i> * <i>Alphonsus, King of Aragon</i>	Cambridge (?) Queen's (?)	Rose built; Mary, Queen of Scots, executed
	T. Kyd	* <i>The Spanish Tragedy</i>	Strange's	
	C. Marlowe	* <i>1 & 2 Tamburlaine the Great</i>	Admiral's	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1588	R. Greene & T. Lodge	<i>*A Looking Glass for London and England</i>	Queen's (?)	Spanish armada
	T. Hughes <i>et al.</i>	<i>The Misfortunes of Arthur</i>	Gray's Inn at Court	
	M. Kyffin	<i>Andria</i>	Closet	
	R. Wilson	<i>*The Three Lords and Three Ladies of London</i>	Queen's	
1589	Anon.	<i>*The Wars of Cyrus</i>	?	English attacks on Portuguese coast
	R. Greene	<i>*Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay</i>	Strange's	
	J. Lyly	<i>Midas</i>	Paul's	
		<i>*Mother Bombie</i>	Paul's	
	C. Marlowe	<i>*The Jew of Malta</i>	Strange's	
	A. Munday	<i>*John a Kent and John a Cumber</i>	Admiral's (?)	
	G. Peele	<i>*The Battle of Alcazar</i>	Admiral's	
1590	W. Shakespeare	<i>*1 Henry VI</i>	Strange's	
	Anon.	<i>*The Warning for Fair Women</i>	Chamberlain's	
	R. Greene	<i>*James IV</i>	Queen's (?)	
		<i>*George a Greene</i>	Sussex's	
	M. Herbert	<i>Antonius</i>	Closet	
	T. Kyd (?)	<i>*Soliman and Perseda</i>	?	
	J. Lyly	<i>*Love's Metamorphosis</i>	Paul's	
	A. Munday (?)	<i>*Fair Em, the Miller's Daughter</i>	Strange's	
	W. Shakespeare (?)	<i>Edward III</i>	Admiral's (?)	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>*2 Henry VI</i>	Strange's	
		<i>*3 Henry VI</i>	Strange's	
		<i>*The Two Gentlemen of Verona</i>	?	
	R. Wilson	<i>*The Cobbler's Prophecy</i>	Court (?)	
	Anon.	<i>*King Leir</i>	Queen's (?)	
	Anon.	<i>*Mucedorus</i>	?	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	Anon.	* <i>The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England</i>	?	
1591	A. Fraunce	<i>Phyllis and Amyntas</i>	Closet	
	R. Greene	* <i>Orlando Furioso</i>	Queen's and Strange's	
	G. Peele	* <i>Edward I</i>	Queen's (?)	
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i>	Queen's (?)	
		* <i>The Comedy of Errors</i>	Strange's (?)	
		* <i>Richard III</i>	Strange's (?)	
		* <i>Titus Andronicus</i>	Strange's (?)	
	Anon.	* <i>Arden of Faversham</i>	?	
	Anon.	* <i>Jack Straw</i>	?	
	Anon.	* <i>The True Tragedy of Richard III</i>	Queen's	
1592	R. Greene (?)	* <i>I Selimus</i>	Queen's	Plague closes playhouses for two years
		* <i>John of Bordeaux</i>	Strange's (?)	
	C. Marlowe	* <i>Doctor Faustus</i>	Admiral's	
	C. Marlowe	* <i>Edward II</i>	Pembroke's	Pembroke's Men become active
	T. Nashe	<i>Summer's Last Will and Testament</i>	Whitgift's house (?)	
	W. Warner	* <i>Menaechmi</i>	Closet	
	Anon.	<i>A Knack to Know a Knav</i>	Strange's	
	Anon.	* <i>Thomas of Woodstock</i>	?	
1593	S. Daniel	<i>Cleopatra</i>	Closet	
	J. Lyly	* <i>The Woman in the Moon</i>	?	
	C. Marlowe	<i>The Massacre at Paris</i>	Strange's	
	G. Peele	* <i>The Old Wives Tale</i>	Queen's	
		* <i>David and Bethsabe</i>	?	
	Anon.	* <i>Edmund Ironside</i>	?	
	Anon.	* <i>Guy Earl of Warwick</i>	?	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1594	T. Heywood	<i>The Four Prentices of London</i>	Admiral's	Series of poor harvests begins, leading to hoarding, riots
	T. Kyd	<i>Cornelia</i>	Closet (?)	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>*Love's Labour's Lost</i>	?	
	R. Yarrington	<i>*Two Lamentable Tragedies</i>	Admiral's (?)	
	Anon.	<i>*Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany</i>	?	
	Anon.	<i>A Knack to Know an Honest Man</i>	Admiral's	
1595	Anon. ('W.S.')	<i>*Locrine</i>	?	Swan built;
	A. Munday <i>et al.</i>	<i>*Sir Thomas More</i>	Worcester's (?)	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>*Richard II</i>	Chamberlain's	
		<i>*Romeo and Juliet</i>	Chamberlain's (?)	Raleigh's voyage to Guiana; Tyrone's Irish rebellion
		<i>*A Midsummer Night's Dream</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	<i>*Caesar and Pompey</i>	Trinity College, Oxford	
1596	G. Chapman	<i>The Blind Beggar of Alexandria</i>	Admiral's	Essex attacks Cadiz
	F. Greville	<i>*Mustapha</i>	Closet	
	B. Jonson	<i>*A Tale of a Tub</i>	Admiral's (?)	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>*King John</i>	Chamberlain's	
		<i>*The Merchant of Venice</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	<i>Captain Thomas Stukeley</i>	Admiral's	
1597	G. Chapman	<i>An Humorous Day's Mirth</i>	Admiral's	Second Blackfriars built; second armada fails
	B. Jonson	<i>*The Case is Altered</i>	?	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>*1 Henry IV</i>	Chamberlain's	
		<i>*2 Henry IV</i>	Chamberlain's	
		<i>The Merry Wives of Windsor</i>	Chamberlain's	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1598	S. Brandon	<i>The Virtuous Octavia</i>	Closet	Comprehensive Poor Law enacted
	H. Chettle & A. Munday	1 and 2 <i>Robin Hood</i>	Admiral's	
	W. Haughton	<i>Englishmen for My Money</i>	Admiral's	
	B. Jonson	<i>Every Man in his Humour</i>	Chamberlain's	
	H. Porter	* <i>The Two Angry Women of Abington</i>	Admiral's	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>Much Ado about Nothing</i>	Chamberlain's	
1599	T. Dekker	<i>Old Fortunatus</i>	Admiral's	Globe built; Essex in Ireland
	T. Dekker	<i>The Shoemaker's Holiday</i>	Admiral's	
	M. Drayton <i>et al.</i>	1 <i>Sir John Oldcastle</i>	Admiral's	
	T. Heywood <i>et al.</i>	*1 & 2 <i>Edward IV</i>	Derby's	
	B. Jonson	<i>Every Man out of his Humour</i>	Chamberlain's	
	J. Marston	* <i>Antonio and Mellida</i>	Paul's	
	J. Marston (?)	* <i>Histriomastix</i>	Paul's (?)	
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>Henry V</i>	Chamberlain's	
		<i>Julius Caesar</i>	Chamberlain's	
		* <i>As You Like It</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	* <i>Club Law</i>	Clare Hall, Cambridge	
	Anon.	* <i>A Larum for London</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	* <i>Look about You</i>	Admiral's	
1600	Anon.	* <i>The Pilgrimage to Parnassus</i>	St John's College, Cambridge	Fortune built; Gowrie plot against James VI of Scotland
	H. Chettle & W. Haughton	1 <i>The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green</i>	Admiral's	
	H. Chettle, T. Dekker, & W. Haughton	<i>Patient Grissil</i>	Admiral's	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	J. Day, T. Dekker, & W. Haughton	<i>The Spanish Moor's Tragedy</i>	Admiral's	
	F. Greville	* <i>Alaham</i>	Closet	
	W. Haughton	<i>The Devil and his Dame</i>	Admiral's	
	J. Marston	* <i>Antonio's Revenge</i>	Paul's	
		<i>Jack Drum's Entertainment</i>	Paul's	
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>Hamlet</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	<i>Lust's Dominion</i>	Admiral's (?)	
	Anon.	* <i>The Maid's Metamorphosis</i>	Paul's	
	Anon.	* ₁ <i>The Return from Parnassus</i>	St John's College, Cambridge	
	Anon.	* <i>Thomas Lord Cromwell</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	* <i>The Weakest Goeth to the Wall</i>	Oxford's	
	Anon.	<i>The Wisdom of Dr Dodypoll</i>	Paul's	
1601	G. Chapman	<i>All Fools</i>	Queen's Revels	Essex's revolt, execution; further Poor Law amends 1598 and sets pattern for centuries
	T. Dekker	* <i>Satiromastix</i>	Chamberlain's	
	T. Dekker (?)	<i>Blurt, Master Constable</i>	Paul's	
	J. Dymock (?)	<i>Il Pastor Fido</i>	Closet (?)	
	B. Jonson	* <i>Cynthia's Revels</i>	Chapel	
		* <i>Poetaster</i>	Chapel	
	J. Marston	<i>What You Will</i>	Paul's	
	W. Percy	<i>Arabia Sitiens</i>	?	
		<i>The Cuckqueans and Cuckolds</i>	?	
		<i>Errants</i>		
	W. Shakespeare	<i>Twelfth Night</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	<i>Liberality and Prodigality</i>	Chapel	
	Anon.	* <i>The Trial of Chivalry</i>	Derby's	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1602	G. Chapman	* <i>The Gentleman Usher</i>	Chapel	
		* <i>May Day</i>	Chapel	
		* <i>Sir Giles Goosecap</i>	Chapel	
	H. Chettle	<i>Hoffman</i>	Admiral's	
	T. Dekker & J. Webster	* <i>Sir Thomas Wyatt</i>	Queen Anne's	
	T. Dekker (?)	* <i>The Merry Devil of Edmonton</i>	Chamberlain's	
	T. Heywood	* <i>1 The Fair Maid of the West</i>	?	
		* <i>The Royal King and the Loyal Subject</i>	Worcester's	
	T. Heywood (?)	* <i>How a Man May Choose a Good Wife from a Bad</i>	Worcester's	
	W. Percy	<i>A Country Tragedy</i>	?	
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>Troilus and Cressida</i>	Chamberlain's	
	Anon.	* <i>The Fair Maid of the Exchange</i>	?	
	Anon.	* <i>Timon</i>	Inner Temple (?)	
	Anon.	* <i>Wily Beguiled</i>	Paul's (?)	
1603	W. Alexander	<i>Darius</i>	Closet	Accession of
	T. Heywood	<i>A Woman Killed with Kindness</i>	Worcester's	James I; serious outbreak of
	B. Jonson	<i>Sejanus</i>	King's Men	plague;
	J. Marston	* <i>The Malcontent</i>	Queen's Revels	'Main' and
	T. Middleton	* <i>The Family of Love</i>	Admiral's (?)	'Bye' plots;
	W. Percy	<i>The Fairy Pastoral</i>	Syon House (?)	Admiral's Men become Prince
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>Measure for Measure</i>	King's Men	Henry's Men; Chamberlain's
	Anon.	* <i>2 The Return from Parnassus</i>	St John's College, Cambridge	Men become King's Men

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1604	Anon.	<i>Narcissus</i>	St John's College, Oxford	
	Anon.	<i>Philotus</i>	Closet (?)	
	W. Alexander	<i>Croesus</i>	Closet	Worcester's Men
	E. Cary	* <i>Miriam, the Fair Queen of Jewry</i>	Closet	become Queen Anne's Men;
	G. Chapman	* <i>Bussy D'Ambois</i>	Paul's	Queen's Revels
	S. Daniel	<i>Philotas</i>	Queen's Revels	become active;
	J. Day	* <i>Law Tricks</i>	King's Revels	Hampton Court
	T. Dekker (?)	* <i>The London Prodigal</i>	King's Men	conference;
	T. Dekker & T. Middleton	1 <i>Honest Whore</i>	Prince Henry's	peace treaty with Spain;
	T. Dekker & J. Webster	<i>Westward Ho</i>	Paul's	negotiations over Union with
	T. Heywood	*1 <i>If You Know not Me</i>	Queen Anne's	Scotland begin
		* <i>The Wise Woman of Hogsdon</i>	Queen Anne's	and continue until 1607
	J. Marston	* <i>The Dutch Courtesan</i>	Queen's Revels	
		* <i>Poetaster or The Fawn</i>	Queen's Revels	
	T. Middleton	* <i>The Phoenix</i>	Paul's	
	T. Rowley	* <i>When You See Me You Know Me</i>	Prince Henry's	
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>Othello</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>All's Well that Ends Well</i>	King's Men	
	F. Verney	* <i>Antiope</i>	Trinity College, Oxford	
	Anon.	* <i>The Birth of Hercules</i>	Christ's College, Cambridge (?)	
	Anon.	* <i>Charlemagne</i>	?	
	Anon.	* <i>The Fair Maid of Bristow</i>	King's Men	
	Anon.	*1 <i>Jeronimo</i>	King's Men (?)	
	Anon.	<i>The Wit of a Woman</i>	?	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1605	G. Chapman	* <i>Caesar and Pompey</i>	?	*Red Bull built; Gunpowder Plot
		<i>Monsieur d'Olive</i>	Queen's Revels	
		* <i>The Widow's Tears</i>	Queen's Revels (?)	
	G. Chapman, B. Jonson & J. Marston	<i>Eastward Ho</i>	Queen's Revels	
	S. Daniel	<i>The Queen's Arcadia</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	T. Dekker	* <i>2 Honest Whore</i>	Prince Henry's	
	T. Dekker & J. Webster	<i>Northward Ho</i>	Paul's	
	T. Heywood	<i>2 If You Know Not Me</i>	Queen Anne's	
	T. Middleton	* <i>Michaelmas Term</i>	Paul's	
		<i>A Trick to Catch the Old One</i>	Paul's	
	T. Middleton & ?	<i>A Yorkshire Tragedy</i>	King's Men	
	W. Shakespeare & T. Middleton (?)	* <i>Timon of Athens</i>	King's Men	
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>King Lear</i>	King's Men	
	Anon.	* <i>Nobody and Somebody</i>	Queen Anne's (?)	
1606	R. Armin	* <i>The Two Maids of More-Clacke</i>	King's Revels	
	B. Barnes	<i>The Devil's Charter</i>	King's Men	Whitefriars built
	F. Beaumont	<i>The Woman Hater</i>	Paul's	
	F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher	* <i>Love's Cure</i>	King's Men (?)	
	J. Day	<i>The Isle of Gulls</i>	Queen's Revels	
	T. Dekker	* <i>The Whore of Babylon</i>	Prince Henry's	
	J. Fletcher & ?	* <i>The Noble Gentleman</i>	King's Men	
	B. Jonson	* <i>Volpone</i>	King's Men	
	J. Marston	* <i>Sophonisba</i>	Queen's Revels	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	T. Middleton	<i>*A Mad World My Masters</i>	Paul's	
		<i>The Puritan</i>	Paul's	
		<i>*The Revenger's Tragedy</i>	King's Men	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>Macbeth</i>	King's Men	
		<i>*Antony and Cleopatra</i>	King's Men	
	E. Sharpham	<i>The Fleer</i>	Queen's Revels	
	G. Wilkins	<i>*The Miserie of Enforced Marriage</i>	King's Men	
1607	W. Alexander	<i>*The Alexandrian Tragedy</i>	Closet	King's Revels (boys) at
		<i>Julius Caesar</i>	Closet	Whitefriars;
	F. Beaumont	<i>*The Knight of the Burning Pestle</i>	Queen's Revels	Plantation (colonization)
	J. Day, W. Rowley, & G. Wilkins	<i>The Travels of the Three English Brothers</i>	Queen Anne's	of Virginia
	T. Heywood	<i>*The Rape of Lucrece</i>	Queen Anne's	
	L. Machin (?)	<i>*Every Woman in her Humour</i>	King's Revels (?)	
	J. Marston & W. Barkstead	<i>*The Insatiate Countess</i>	Queen's Revels	
	J. Mason	<i>*The Turk</i>	King's Revels	
	T. Middleton	<i>Your Five Gallants</i>	Paul's (?)	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>*Pericles</i>	King's Men	
	E. Sharpham	<i>Cupid's Whirligig</i>	King's Revels	
	Anon.	<i>Claudius Tiberius Nero</i>	Closet (?)	
1608	L. Barry	<i>*Ram Ally</i>	King's Revels	King's Men lease
	G. Chapman	<i>*Byron's Conspiracy</i>	Queen's Revels	Blackfriars
		<i>*Byron's Tragedy</i>	Queen's Revels	
	J. Day	<i>*Humour Out of Breath</i>	King's Revels	
	J. Fletcher	<i>*The Faithful Shepherdess</i>	Queen's Revels (?)	
	J. Fletcher & F. Beaumont	<i>*Cupid's Revenge</i>	Queen's Revels	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1609	G. Markham & L. Machin	<i>*The Dumb Knight</i>	King's Revels	
	W. Rowley	<i>*A Shoemaker a Gentleman</i>	Queen Anne's (?)	
	W. Rowley & ?	<i>*The Birth of Merlin</i>	?	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>Coriolanus</i>	King's Men	
	F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher	<i>Philaster</i>	King's Men	Cockpit (Phoenix) built; Plantation (colonization) of Ulster
		<i>*The Coxcomb</i>	Queen's Revels	
	N. Field	<i>*A Woman is a Weathercock</i>	Queen's Revels	
	T. Heywood & W. Rowley	<i>*Fortune by Land and Sea</i>	Queen Anne's	
	B. Jonson	<i>Epiccene</i>	Queen's Revels	
	T. Middleton & W. Rowley	<i>*Wit at Several Weapons</i>	?	
1610	W. Shakespeare	<i>*The Winter's Tale</i>	King's Men	
	F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher	<i>*The Maid's Tragedy</i>	King's Men	Petition of Right on impositions;
	G. Chapman	<i>*The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois</i>	Queen's Revels	Great Contract fails in Parliament
	R. Daborne	<i>*A Christian Turned Turk</i>	?	
	T. Heywood	<i>*The Golden Age</i>	Queen Anne's	
1611	B. Jonson	<i>The Alchemist</i>	King's Men	
	W. Shakespeare	<i>*Cymbeline</i>	King's Men	
	F. Beaumont & J. Fletcher	<i>A King and No King</i>	King's Men	Baronetcies sold;
	J. Cooke	<i>Greene's Tu Quoque</i>	Queen Anne's	King James translation of Bible; Lady Elizabeth's Men become active
	T. Dekker	<i>*Match Me in London</i>	Queen Anne's (?)	
	T. Dekker (& R. Daborne?)	<i>*If It Be Not Good, the Devil Is in It</i>	Queen Anne's	
	T. Dekker & T. Middleton	<i>The Roaring Girl</i>	Prince Henry's	
	N. Field	<i>*Amends for Ladies</i>	Queen's Revels	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	J. Fletcher	* <i>Monsieur Thomas</i>	Queen's Revels (?)	
		* <i>The Night Walker</i>	Lady Elizabeth's (?)	
		* <i>The Woman's Prize</i>	King's Men (?)	
	T. Heywood	* <i>The Brazen Age</i>	Queen's	
		* <i>The Silver Age</i>	Queen's & King's	
	B. Jonson	<i>Catiline His Conspiracy</i>	King's Men	
	T. Middleton	<i>The Second Maiden's Tragedy</i>	King's Men	
	W. Rowley	* <i>A New Wonder</i>	?	
	W. Shakespeare	* <i>The Tempest</i>	King's Men	
	C. Tourneur	* <i>The Atheist's Tragedy</i>	King's Men (?)	
1612	'R.A.'	* <i>The Valiant Welshman</i>	Prince's Men	Prince's Men become Lady Elizabeth's (?) active;
	G. Chapman	* <i>Chabot, Admiral of France</i>		Lancashire
	J. Fletcher	* <i>The Captain</i>	King's Men	witches
	T. Heywood	* <i>1 & 2 Iron Age</i>	Queen's	hanged; Prince Henry dies
	J. Webster	* <i>The White Devil</i>	Queen Anne's	
1613	N. Field & J. Fletcher	<i>The Honest Man's Fortune</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	Prince Henry's become
	J. Fletcher	* <i>Bonduca</i>	King's Men	Palsgrave's
	J. Fletcher & N. Field (?)	* <i>Four Plays in One</i>	?	Men; Globe burns down;
	J. Fletcher & F. Beaumont	* <i>The Scornful Lady</i>	Queen's Revels (?)	Elizabeth Stuart marries
	T. Middleton	<i>A Chaste Maid in Cheapside</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	Frederick Elector
		* <i>No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's</i>	Lady Elizabeth's (?)	Palatine (later King of
	W. Shakespeare & J. Fletcher	<i>Henry VIII</i>	King's Men	Bohemia)
		* <i>The Two Noble Kinsmen</i>	King's Men	
	J. Stephens	<i>Cynthia's Revenge</i>	Closet	
	R. Tailor	<i>The Hog Hath Lost His Pearl</i>	Apprentices at Whitefriars	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1614	S. Daniel	<i>Hymen's Triumph</i>	?	Second Globe built; Hope built; Addled Parliament
	J. Fletcher	* <i>Valentinian</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>Wit Without Money</i>	Lady Elizabeth's (?)	
	B. Jonson	<i>Bartholomew Fair</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
	W[entworth?]	* <i>The Hector of Germany</i>	Tradesmen at Bull & Curtain	
	J. Webster	* <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i>	King's Men	
1615	R. Zouche	* <i>The Sophister</i>	Oxford	Porter's Hall built; Earl and Countess of Somerset tried for Overbury's murder
	J. Fletcher & P. Massinger	* <i>Thierry and Theodoret</i>	King's Men	
	T. Middleton	* <i>More Dissemblers Besides Women</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>The Witch</i>	King's Men	
	'S.S.'	* <i>The Honest Lawyer</i>	Queen Anne's	
	T. Tomkis	<i>Albumazar</i>	Trinity College, Cambridge	
1616	J. Fletcher & F. Beaumont	* <i>Love's Pilgrimage</i>	King's Men	Pocohontas arrives in England
	J. Fletcher & T. Middleton	* <i>The Nice Valour</i>	?	
	B. Jonson	<i>The Devil is an Ass</i>	King's Men	
	T. Middleton	* <i>The Widow</i>	King's Men	
	T. Middleton & W. Rowley	* <i>A Fair Quarrel</i>	Prince's	
1617	A. Brewer	* <i>The Lovesick King</i>	?	James I visits Scotland
	R. Daborne	* <i>The Poor Man's Comfort</i>	Queen Anne's	
	J. Fletcher	* <i>The Chances</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Mad Lover</i>	King's Men	
	J. Fletcher & P. Massinger	* <i>The Bloody Brother</i>	King's Men (?)	
	J. Fletcher, P. Massinger, & N. Field	* <i>The Queen of Corinth</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>The Knight of Malta</i>	King's Men	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	T. Goffe	* <i>Orestes</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	J. Webster	* <i>The Devil's Law-Case</i>	Queen Anne's	
	Anon.	* <i>Stonyhurst Pageants</i>	Closet (?)	
1618	N. Field & P. Massinger	* <i>The Fatal Dowry</i>	King's Men	Ralegh executed; Synod of Dort; 30 Years' War begins
	J. Fletcher	<i>The Loyal Subject</i>	King's Men	
	J. Fletcher & P. Massinger	* <i>Beggars' Bush</i>	King's Men	
	T. Goffe	* <i>The Raging Turk</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	B. Holiday	<i>Technogamia</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	T. Middleton	* <i>Hengist, King of Kent</i>	?	
	T. Middleton, W. Rowley, & P. Massinger	* <i>The Old Law</i>	?	
	H. Shirley	* <i>The Martyred Soldier</i>	Queen Anne's (?)	
	Anon.	* <i>Swetnam the Woman-Hater</i>	Queen Anne's	
1619	J. Cumber (?)	* <i>The Two Merry Milkmaids</i>	Red Bull	Queen Anne dies and remnant of her company becomes Red Bull (Revels) Company; Olden Barnavelts executed
	J. Fletcher	* <i>The Humorous Lieutenant</i>	King's Men	
	J. Fletcher & P. Massinger	* <i>The Little French Lawyer</i>	King's Men	
		<i>Sir John van Olden Barnavelts</i>	King's Men	
	J. Ford	* <i>The Laws of Candy</i>	King's Men	
	T. Goffe (?)	* <i>The Careless Shepherdess</i>	Christ Church, Oxford (?)	
		<i>The Courageous Turk</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	W. Rowley	* <i>All's Lost by Lust</i>	Prince's	
	Anon.	* <i>Nero</i>	?	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1620	T. Dekker & P. Massinger	<i>The Virgin Martyr</i>	Red Bull	Mayflower arrives in Massachusetts Colony
	J. Fletcher	* <i>Women Pleased</i>	King's Men	
	J. Fletcher & P. Massinger	* <i>The Custom of the Country</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>The Double Marriage</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>The False One</i>	King's Men	
	T. May	<i>The Heir</i>	Red Bull	
	T. Middleton & W. Rowley	<i>The World Tossed at Tennis</i>	Prince's	
	Anon.	* <i>The Costly Whore</i>	Red Bull (?)	
1621	T. Dekker, J. Ford, & W. Rowley	<i>The Witch of Edmonton</i>	Prince's	Attack on monopolies; impeachment revived
	J. Fletcher	* <i>The Island Princess</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>The Pilgrim</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>The Wild Goose Chase</i>	King's Men	
	P. Massinger	* <i>The Maid of Honour</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
	T. Middleton	* <i>Women Beware Women</i>	King's Men (?)	
	T. Middleton & J. Webster	* <i>Anything for a Quiet Life</i>	King's Men	
	Anon.	* <i>The Faithful Friends</i>	?	
	T. Dekker	<i>The Noble Spanish Soldier</i>	Admiral's (?)	
	J. Fletcher & P. Massinger	<i>The Prophetess</i>	King's Men	
1622		<i>The Sea Voyage</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Spanish Curate</i>	King's Men	
	G. Markham & W. Sampson	* <i>Herod and Antipater</i>	Red Bull	
	P. Massinger	* <i>The Duke of Milan</i>	King's Men	
	T. Middleton & W. Rowley	<i>The Changeling</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
	W. Rowley (?)	* <i>A Match at Midnight</i>	Red Bull	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	Anon.	<i>*The Two Noble Ladies</i>	Red Bull	
1623	T. Dekker	<i>*The Welsh Ambassador</i>	Lady Elizabeth's (?)	Prince Charles, Duke of Buckingham
	T. Dekker & J. Ford	<i>The Spanish Gypsy</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	travel to Spain
	J. Fletcher	<i>The Wandering Lovers</i>	King's Men	to negotiate marriage with Infanta
	J. Fletcher & W. Rowley	<i>The Maid in the Mill</i>	King's Men	
	J. Mabbe (?)	<i>*The Captive Lady</i>	?	
1624	P. Massinger	<i>The Bondman</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
	R. Davenport	<i>The City Nightcap</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	Statute against Monopolies
	T. Drue	<i>The Duchess of Suffolk</i>	Palsgrave's	
	J. Fletcher	<i>Rule a Wife and Have a Wife</i>	King's Men	
		<i>A Wife for a Month</i>	King's Men	
	T. Heywood	<i>The Captives</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
	P. Massinger	<i>The Parliament of Love</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
		<i>The Renegado</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
		<i>*The Unnatural Combat</i>	King's Men	
	T. Middleton	<i>A Game at Chess</i>	King's Men	
	J. Webster	<i>*Appius and Virginia</i>	?	
1625	'J.D.'	<i>*The Knave in Grain</i>	Red Bull	Accession of Charles I;
	R. Davenport	<i>*A New Trick to Catch the Devil</i>	Queen Henrietta's (?)	marriage to Henrietta
	J. Fisher	<i>*Fuimus Troes</i>	Magdalen College, Oxford	Maria of France; Queen Henrietta's
	J. Fletcher & P. Massinger	<i>*The Elder Brother</i>	King's Men	Men become active; serious outbreak of plague;
	T. Heywood	<i>*The English Traveller</i>	Queen Henrietta's	English attack on Cadiz
		<i>*The Escapes of Jupiter</i>	?	repulsed
	P. Massinger	<i>A New Way to Pay Old Debts</i>	Queen Henrietta's	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	W. Sampson	* <i>The Vow Breaker</i>	?	
	J. Shirley	<i>The School of Compliment</i>	Lady Elizabeth's	
	J. Webster & W. Rowley	* <i>A Cure for a Cuckold</i>	?	
	Anon.	* <i>The Partial Law</i>	Closet	
1626	J. Fletcher & ?	<i>The Fair Maid of the Inn</i>	King's Men	Remnant of Prince's Men forms Red Bull Company; Forced Loan controversy
	W. Hemming	* <i>The Jews' Tragedy</i>	?	
	B. Jonson	<i>The Staple of News</i>	King's Men	
	P. Massinger	<i>The Roman Actor</i>	King's Men	
	T. May	<i>Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt</i>	?	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Maid's Revenge</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	'J.W.'	* <i>The Wedding The Valiant Scot</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	Anon.	<i>Dick of Devonshire</i>	?	
1627	W. Davenant	<i>The Cruel Brother</i>	King's Men	Start of ineffective English intervention (at Isle of Rhé, La Rochelle) on behalf of Huguenots
	P. Massinger	<i>The Great Duke of Florence</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	T. May	* <i>Antigone, the Theban Princess</i>	Unacted	
	T. Randolph	* <i>Plutophthalmia Plutogamia</i>	Trinity College, Cambridge (?)	
1628	W. Davenant	* <i>Albovine, King of the Lombards</i>	Unacted	Petition of Right; assassination of Buckingham
	R. Davenport	* <i>King John and Matilda</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	J. Ford	<i>The Lover's Melancholy</i>	King's Men	
		* <i>The Queen</i>	?	
	R. Gomersall	* <i>Ludovick Sforza</i>	Unacted (?)	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	T. May	<i>Julia Agrippina, Empress of Rome</i>	?	
	H. Reynolds	<i>Aminta</i>	Closet	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Witty Fair One</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	Anon.	<i>*Philander, King of Thrace</i>	?	
1629	R. Brome	<i>The Lovesick Maid</i>	King's Men	Salisbury Court built; beginning of 11-year period without meeting of Parliament
		<i>The Northern Lass</i>	King's Men	
	L. Carlell	<i>*The Deserving Favourite</i>	King's Men	
	J. Clavell (?)	<i>*The Soddered Citizen</i>	King's Men	
	W. Davenant	<i>The Just Italian</i>	King's Men	
		<i>*The Siege</i>	King's Men (?)	
	J. Ford	<i>*The Broken Heart</i>	King's Men	
	B. Jonson	<i>The New Inn</i>	King's Men	
	P. Massinger	<i>The Picture</i>	King's Men	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Grateful Servant</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	Anon.	<i>*Hierarchomachia</i>	?	
1630	R. Brome	<i>*The City Wit</i>	King's Revels	Peace treaties with Spain and France
	T. Heywood	<i>*2 The Fair Maid of the West</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	T. Randolph	<i>Amyntas</i>	King's Revels	
		<i>The Muses' Looking Glass</i>	King's Revels	
	J. Sidnam	<i>*Filli de Sciro</i>	Closet	
		<i>Il Pastor Fido</i>	Closet	
	A. Wilson	<i>*The Inconstant Lady</i>	King's Men	
1631	R. Brome	<i>*The Queen's Exchange</i>	King's Men (?)	Prince Charles's Men become active
	T. Dekker	<i>*The Wonder of a Kingdom</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	J. Mabbe	<i>The Spanish Bawd</i>	Closet	
	S. Marmion	<i>Holland's Leaguer</i>	Prince Charles's	
	P. Massinger	<i>Believe as You List</i>	King's Men	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1632	J. Shirley	<i>The Emperor of the East</i>	King's Men	Cockpit-in-Court converted
		* <i>The Contention for Honour and Riches</i>	Privately acted (?)	
		<i>The Humorous Courtier</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>Love's Cruelty</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	A. Wilson	<i>The Traitor</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>The Swisser</i>	King's Men	
	'T.B.'	* <i>The Country Girl</i>	King's Men (?)	
		R. Brome	* <i>The Novella</i>	
	R. Brome	<i>The Weeding of the Covent Garden</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Weeding of the Covent Garden</i>	King's Men (?)	
	J. Ford	* <i>Love's Sacrifice</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		* <i>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	P. Hausted	<i>The Rival Friends</i>	Queens' College, Cambridge	
	B. Jonson	<i>The Magnetic Lady</i>	King's Men	
	P. Massinger	<i>The City Madam</i>	King's Men	
1633	W. Percy	<i>Necromantes</i>	Closet (?)	Laud becomes Archbishop of Canterbury; Charles visits Scotland
	T. Randolph	<i>The Jealous Lovers</i>	Trinity College, Cambridge	
		J. Shirley	<i>The Ball Changes</i>	
	A. Cockain	<i>Hyde Park</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>Trappolin</i>	?	
		<i>Creduto Principe</i>		
	A. Cowley	* <i>Love's Riddle</i>	Unacted	
	J. Ford	* <i>Perkin Warbeck</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	T. Heywood	* <i>A Maidenhead Well Lost</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		S. Marmion	* <i>A Fine Companion</i>	
	P. Massinger	<i>The Guardian</i>	Prince Charles's	
		<i>The Shepherd's Paradise</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Launching of the Mary</i>	Court	
	W. Montague	<i>The Launching of the Mary</i>	?	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1634	T. Nabbes	<i>Covent Garden</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Bird in a Cage</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>The Gamester</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>The Young Admiral</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	A. Wilson	<i>The Corporal</i>	King's Men	
	R. Brome & T. Heywood	<i>The Late Lancashire Witches</i>	King's Men	
	W. Davenant	<i>Love and Honour</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Wits</i>	King's Men	
	H. Glapthorne	<i>*Albertus Wallenstein</i>	King's Men	
	T. Heywood	<i>Love's Mistress</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	P. Massinger & J. Fletcher (?)	<i>Cleander</i>	King's Men	
		<i>A Very Woman</i>	King's Men	
	T. Nabbes	<i>*Tottenham Court</i>	Prince's Men (?)	
	[W.?] Peaps (?)	<i>*Love in its Ecstasy</i>	Unacted	
	J. Rutter	<i>*The Shepherd's Holiday</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
1635	J. Shirley	<i>The Example</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>The Opportunity</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	R. Brome	<i>*The New Academy</i>	King's Revels (?)	
		<i>*The Queen and Concubine</i>	King's Revels	
		<i>The Sparagus Garden</i>	King's Revels	
	W. Cartwright	<i>*The Ordinary</i>	Christ Church, Oxford (?)	
	W. Davenant	<i>News from Plymouth</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Platonic Lovers</i>	King's Men	
	J. Ford	<i>*The Fancies Chaste and Noble</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	H. Glapthorne	<i>The Lady Mother</i>	King's Revels	
	T. Heywood	<i>*A Challenge for Beauty</i>	King's Men	
	J. Jones	<i>*Adrasta</i>	Unacted	
	T. Jordan	<i>*Money is an Ass</i>	King's Revels (?)	
	H. Killigrew	<i>The Conspiracy</i>	King's Men	
		<i>*The Prisoners</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	J. Kirke	<i>*The Seven Champions of Christendom</i>	Prince Charles's (?)	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	S. Marmion	<i>*The Antiquary</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	T. Nabbes	<i>Hannibal and Scipio</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	N. Richards	<i>Messalina, the Roman Empress</i>	King's Revels	
	W. Rider	<i>*The Twins</i>	King's Revels (?)	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Coronation</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>The Lady of Pleasure</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	Anon.	<i>*Love's Changelings' Change</i>	Closet (?)	
	Anon.	<i>Wit's Triumvirate</i>	?	
1636	L. Carlell	<i>*1 & 2 Arviragus and Philicia</i>	King's Men	
	W. Cartwright	<i>The Royal Slave</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	H. Glapthorne	<i>The Hollander</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	T. Killigrew	<i>*Claricilla</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>*The Princess</i>	King's Men (?)	
	P. Massinger	<i>The Bashful Lover</i>	King's Men	
	T. May	<i>The Old Couple</i>	?	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Duke's Mistress</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	W. Strode	<i>The Floating Island</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	G. Wilde	<i>Love's Hospital</i>	St John's College, Oxford	
1637	W. Berkeley	<i>*The Lost Lady</i>	King's Men	Beeston's Boys,
	R. Brome	<i>The English Moor</i>	Queen's	Queen's Men and, in Dublin,
	L. Carlell	<i>*The Fool would be a Favourite</i>	Queen's (?)	Ogilby's Men become active;
		<i>*Osmond the Great Turk</i>	Queen's (?)	Werburgh Street Theatre built in Dublin;
	W. Cartwright	<i>*The Lady Errant</i>	Privately acted	Ship-money case
	H. Glapthorne	<i>*The Ladies' Privilege</i>	Beeston's Boys	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
1638	B. Jonson	<i>*Mortimer his Fall</i>	Unacted	Solemn League and Covenant (Scotland) launched
		<i>*The Sad Shepherd</i>	Unacted	
	J. Mayne	<i>*The City Match</i>	King's Men	
	T. Neale	<i>The Ward</i>	Unacted	
	J. Rutter	<i>*1 The Cid</i>	Beeston's Boys	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Royal Master</i>	Ogilby's Men	
	J. Speed	<i>The Converted Robber</i>	St John's College, Oxford	
	J. Suckling	<i>Aglaura</i>	King's Men	
		<i>*The Sad One</i>	Unacted	
	Anon.	<i>*The Wasp</i>	King's Revels	
	S. Baylie	<i>*The Wizard</i>	?	
	A. Brome (?)	<i>*The Cunning Lovers</i>	Beeston's Boys	
	R. Brome	<i>*The Antipodes</i>	Queen's	
		<i>*The Damselle</i>	Beeston's Boys (?)	
	L. Carlell	<i>1 & 2 The Passionate Lovers</i>	King's Men	
	W. Cartwright	<i>*The Siege</i>	Unacted (?)	
	W. Davenant	<i>The Fair Favourite</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Unfortunate Lovers</i>	King's Men	
	J. Ford	<i>The Lady's Trial</i>	Beeston's Boys	
	H. Glapthorne	<i>*Argalus and Parthenia</i>	Beeston's Boys	
		<i>*Wit in a Constable</i>	Beeston's Boys	
	C. May	<i>*Grobiana's Nuptials</i>	St John's College, Oxford	
	J. Mayne	<i>*The Amorous War</i>	?	
	R. Mead	<i>*The Combat of Love and Friendship</i>	Christ Church, Oxford	
	T. Nabbes	<i>The Bride</i>	Beeston's Boys	
	T. Rawlins	<i>*The Rebellion</i>	King's Revels	
	J. Rutter	<i>*2 The Cid</i>	Unacted (?)	
	T. Salusbury	<i>*Love or Money</i>	Privately acted	
	J. Shirley	<i>*The Constant Maid</i>	Ogilby's Men, Dublin (?)	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
		<i>*The Doubtful Heir</i>	Ogilby's Men, Dublin	
	J. Suckling	<i>*The Goblins</i>	King's Men	
	Anon.	<i>*The Fairy Knight</i>	?	
1639	R. Brome	<i>*The Lovesick Court</i>	Prince Charles's (?)	First Bishops' War
		<i>*A Mad Couple Well Matched</i>	Beeston's Boys (?)	
	A. Cockain	<i>*The Obstinate Lady</i>	?	
	W. Davenant	<i>The Spanish Lovers</i>	King's Men	
	T. Drue (?)	<i>The Bloody Banquet</i>	Beeston's Boys (?)	
	R. Freeman	<i>Imperiale</i>	Closet (?)	
	W. Hemming	<i>*The Fatal Contract</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
	W. Lower	<i>*The Phoenix in her Flames</i>	Unacted (?)	
	T. Nabbes	<i>*The Unfortunate Mother</i>	Unacted	
	L. Sharpe	<i>*The Noble Stranger</i>	Queen's	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Gentleman of Venice</i>	Ogilby's Men, Dublin (?)	
		<i>*The Politician</i>	Ogilby's Men, Dublin (?)	
		<i>*I St Patrick for Ireland</i>	Ogilby's Men, Dublin	
	J. Suckling	<i>*Brennoralt</i>	King's Men	
1640	R. Brome	<i>*The Court Beggar</i>	Beeston's Boys	Second Bishops' War; Short
	H. Burnell	<i>*Landgartha</i>	Ogilby's Men, Dublin	Parliament; Long
	W. Cavendish & J. Shirley	<i>*The Country Captain</i>	King's Men	Parliament summoned at Oxford
	R. Chamberlain	<i>*The Swaggering Damsel</i>	Beeston's Boys (?)	
	H. Glapthorne (?)	<i>*Revenge for Honour</i>	?	
	J. Gough	<i>*The Strange Discovery</i>	Closet (?)	

Chronological table

Date	Author	Title	Company	Events
	W. Habington	<i>The Queen of Aragon</i>	Amateurs at court	
	S. Harding	* <i>Sicily and Naples</i>	Unacted (?)	
	G. Sandys	<i>Christ's Passion</i>	Closet	
	J. Shirley (?)	<i>The Arcadia</i>	Queen Henrietta's	
		<i>The Imposture</i>	King's Men	
	Anon.	* <i>The Cyprian Conqueror</i>	Closet (?)	
	Anon.	* <i>The Ghost</i>	?	
1641	R. Brome	<i>A Jovial Crew</i>	Beeston's Boys	Star Chamber
	W. Cavendish	* <i>The Variety</i>	King's Men	abolished;
	J. Denham	* <i>The Sophy</i>	King's Men	Strafford
	T. Jordan	<i>The Walks of Islington and Hogsdon</i>	Red Bull (?)	attainted; Laud impeached
	T. Killigrew	* <i>The Parson's Wedding</i>	King's Men	
	F. Quarles	* <i>The Virgin Widow</i>	Privately acted	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Brothers</i>	King's Men	
		<i>The Cardinal</i>	King's Men	
	J. Tatham	* <i>The Distracted State</i>	Red Bull (?)	
	R. Wild	* <i>The Benefice</i>	Cambridge	
1642	A. Cowley	<i>The Guardian</i>	Trinity College, Cambridge	Theatres closed; royal standard raised; battles of Edgehill, Turnham Green
	F. Jaques	<i>The Queen of Corsica</i>	Unacted (?)	
	'J.S.'	* <i>Andromana</i>	Unacted (?)	
	J. Shirley	<i>The Court Secret</i>	Unacted	
		<i>The Sisters</i>	King's Men	

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